Wheel Publication No. 226/227/228/230

A Technique of Living

Based on Buddhist Psychological Principles

Leonard A. Bullen

A Technique of Living

Based on Buddhist Psychological Principles

by

Leonard A. Bullen

Buddhist Publication Society
Kandy • Sri Lanka

The Wheel Publication No. 226 –30

First printing: 1982

and translations and other derivative works are to be clearly marked as such.

Contents

A Technique of Living

Introductory Section

here is one thing that everybody knows by direct experience, and that is that life is a mixture of enjoyment and suffering, happiness and sorrow, pleasure and pain. The intelligent and the stupid, the good and the evil, the rich and the poor, all know some degree of suffering mixed in with their happiness.

There are times, it is true, when we feel free from the heavier burdens of suffering. There are times when our affairs are going well, when we are able to cope adequately with our responsibilities, and when we can meet our obligations without trouble. But there are other times, too, when things do not go so well, when we suffer severe losses and meet with persistent frustrations; and at these times we feel the need for some special mental approach to our problems.

In fact, we need this special approach all of the time, during the good times as well as the bad. We need a special approach to success as well as to failure, to gain as well as to loss, to happiness as well as to sorrow. We need a technique

to handle the easy times as well as the difficult periods.

In brief, we need a technique of living. It can be said in general that any technique is better than none at all. Any well considered approach to the problems of life is better than the unthinking drift of life, but perhaps the most efficient technique is one that involves a considerable understanding of life, an increased mindfulness of the mind's own aims and processes, and a certain degree of self-discipline to keep the mind on its chosen path.

In a technique of this kind, then, the three keywords are understanding, mindfulness, and self-discipline.

Understanding life is a matter of gaining an appreciation—either intellectual or intuitive—of the way living beings act and react. Mindfulness of the mind's own aims and processes involves a sort of inner alertness, a form of attentiveness directed inwardly. And self-discipline is the sustained effort to act and think along certain chosen lines, an effort which requires the exercise of the will.

Of these three elements—understanding, mindfulness, and self-discipline—it is mindfulness which, in the Buddhist system of self-training becomes the focal point.

* * *

If you want to take on any system of mental development, either as an aim in itself or as a means of gaining greater value from life, the cultivation of mindfulness in some direction at least must play a major part in it. In other

words, any system of mental culture must involve the development of the powers of attention.

As you know from direct observation, your attention may be directed outwardly towards the external world of objects or inwardly towards the internal world of ideas. While the development of mindfulness may bring about greater alertness with regard to external happenings, this is not its main aim, at least from the Buddhist viewpoint; its primary purpose is to bring about an increased awareness of what goes on in that "current of existence" that you call your own self.

Some forms of mindfulness are intended to make you more aware and to give you an increased understanding of your own mental processes in general; for these mental processes are the factors that determine what your life will yield—or fail to yield—in terms of enduring happiness.

Now the practise of mindfulness is the focal point of a system of mental discipline, a method of mind-training that forms the core of various forms of Buddhism. It is not intended to deal with Buddhist doctrine and practise as a whole, as we are more interested in a specific aspect of them; but in order to fit this specific aspect of Buddhism into its general framework it may be pertinent to set out, very briefly, the main points of the system of mental discipline known as the Noble Eightfold Path. Here are the various aspects of this Path:

1. *Right Understanding*, a knowledge of the true nature of

existence;

2. *Right Thought*, free from sensuality, ill will, and cruelty;
3. *Right Speech*, speech which is free from falsity, gossip, harshness, and idle babble;
4. *Right Action*, or the avoidance of killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct;
5. *Right Livelihood*, an occupation that harms no conscious living being;
6. *Right Effort*, or the training of the will;
7. *Right Mindfulness*, the perfection of the faculty of attention; and
8. *Right Concentration*, the cultivation of higher mental states with a view to direct knowledge of the Unconditioned, the ultimate reality beyond the relative universe.

* * *

The particular phase of this Noble Eightfold Path in which we are interested, as you can see, is the seventh step, right mindfulness; but the first step—right understanding, especially in the sense of self-understanding—and the sixth, right effort or the training of the will, are also of special interest in this context.

In some lines of mental development the expansion of the field of attention is the aim, while in other forms the field is narrowed and the awareness is thereby intensified.

The expansion of awareness and the intensification of awareness are opposite but complementary modes of mindfulness, and both involve the development of the normal faculty of attention. It is by training the attention, by directing and controlling it, that awareness can be expanded to cover a broader field, or, on the other hand intensified to confine it to a single idea.

Of the two, perhaps, the concentration of the attention on to a single point is of greater importance, for all mental development requires a sharpened awareness.

Compare the fuzzy, dull awareness of the dream state with the sharpened awareness of the normal waking state. In a dream you experience sensations from the outside world but you misinterpret them. Your feet are cold, perhaps, because the rug across the foot of the bed has slipped off; but instead of correctly interpreting the sensation of coldness, you dream that you are walking on a cold street without your shoes. Or a dog barks nearby and you dream you are being pursued by a pack of hungry wolves. These misinterpretations, we are told, are bound up with your various undischarged emotional accumulations and your various complexes, and the external stimuli—the cold feet and the dog's bark—are used as the means of discharging your emotional accumulations or of giving expression to your complexes, up to a point at least.

In waking life you are not guilty of such gross misinterpretations as you are during sleep. When the rug

falls off and your feet become cold, you reach down and pull the rug back into place. When the dog barks, perhaps it brings to mind some childhood story of a boy being pursued by a pack of wolves; but because you are awake and not dreaming you nevertheless realise that the sound you have just heard is nothing more than a dog's bark.

However, while you do not make the gross misinterpretations when in the waking state that you do during sleep, you are nevertheless guilty of some degree of misinterpretation, greater or less according to the extent to which your thought processes are dominated by your emotions and your psychological complexes.

While the concentration of mental energy on a single point is necessary in certain circumstances, a diffuse or widespread distribution of attention is of value in other circumstances, and for an all-round mental development it should be possible to bring the mind into either state with equal facility.

As an example of the restricted scope of awareness, you well know the kind of situation in which you are in the process of writing a letter when the telephone rings in another room. On your way to answer the telephone you put down your pen without giving any special attention to this small act, and afterwards, when you go to take up the pen to continue writing, you have great difficulty in finding it because you are unable to remember where you put it. Unless you make a special effort of mindfulness, the simple

task of attending both to the act of putting the pen down and to the act of walking towards the telephone is too much for you, because the scope of your normal awareness is too confined to embrace these two very simple things at the same time. This is an obvious example of the need for an expansion of the scope of consciousness.

In the ordinary course of workaday life, there is little or no time for the practise of exercises in mental development unless these practises are woven into the general fabric of everyday life. If, however, you find the time occasionally to slow down whatever you are doing perhaps for only a few minutes, an hour, or a day, according to circumstances—in order to give to it your fullest possible attention, then this deliberately-increased awareness will help to establish a general all-round mindfulness during the busier periods of your life.

Under ideal conditions, you should be able to become fully aware of whatever you are doing all your normal waking life. Of course, this continual alertness is normally beyond you. To become fully aware of everything you do throughout your waking life is much more than you can ordinarily achieve, and the more you try to develop this enlarged awareness, the more you realise your inadequacies.

However, if your efforts along the lines of right mindfulness do nothing other than make you more aware of your own unawareness they are thereby fulfilling a very important

purpose. You come to realise the automatic and mechanical nature of much that you do, and you begin to see that you have hitherto been largely caught up in the unthinking drift of life. Only when you begin to become aware of all this can you start your fight to become free from the unthinking drift.

In your ordinary life, no doubt, you meet a succession of problems. May be you are short of money, or your domestic responsibilities are too heavy for you, or the people in the flat upstairs are noisy.

A philosophy of some kind would help you to deal with your problems, of course, but only up to a point, for your problems are mainly practical ones and not philosophical ones. To be of any real use, a philosophy must be developed into a policy and this policy must be organised to become a technique.

Whatever your philosophy and whatever policy and technique you develop from it, it is safe to say that it must embody not only increased mindfulness, but also some form of self-discipline, to be of any real use. Without self-discipline, no form of mental culture can achieve very much.

Self-discipline must be used side by side with the development of mindfulness. You must recognise, of course, that self-discipline alone is of limited value, but coupled with the cultivation of awareness it becomes of much greater value as a part of the technique of living.

Self-discipline is the effort to act and to think along certain pre-determined lines and to avoid acting and thinking along contrary lines.

There is a sharp distinction between discipline which is self-imposed and discipline which is imposed from outside.

You will find that a discipline imposed on you from outside sometimes raises a resistance within you, and you will often tend to resent it. This is so when the discipline is harsh and strict, of course, but it may also be so when it is mild and easy-going. The resentment depends not only on the harshness of the actual discipline to which you must submit, but also on your unwillingness to submit to it.

Thus if you are forced to submit to a light discipline with which you disagree, you will feel rebellious and indeed you may actually rebel against it, even though, viewed dispassionately, it is not harsh. On the other hand, if you were willingly and knowingly to undertake a very strict discipline—if, for example, you were to enter a religious order or voluntarily to join the army—you would tend to conform to it without resentment. And you would do so because, taking on the discipline willingly and knowingly, you would up to a point transform it from an external discipline to a self-discipline.

So an external discipline can become either an occasion for resentment and rebellion or else a means of developing your own mental resources, according to your own attitude towards it.

However, discipline of this kind is not really what we are interested in our present consideration, and we mention it only to bring out the difference between an externally-imposed discipline and the type of discipline which is self-imposed.

You might take on a self-imposed discipline for any of a number of reasons. You might start your daily work very early and continue until very late in order to make money. You might undertake a strict and unappetising diet because you want to become slender and more attractive. Or you might take on a rigid routine of training because you want to win a foot-race. In each of these the self-imposed discipline is not an end in itself—it is only a way of achieving an end.

However, whether it is meant in that way or not, your self-discipline achieves more than it was intended to do; it does more than make you more money, or slim your figure, or win your race, for it builds up in your mental structure qualities which in themselves will increase your capacity for happiness.

If a discipline is imposed on you by others or by circumstances, this externally-imposed discipline is generally concerned with your outer actions rather than with the mental processes which lead up to them. Self-imposed discipline, on the other hand, may be concerned with your outer actions and their effects, or it may be concerned with the desires and emotions which influence

your outer actions; but in either case your inner mental processes and motives are of primary importance, at least in the present context.

At the same time it must be recognised that you can help to control your desires and emotions by controlling their outer manifestations. For example, you may tend to gaze longingly at something you desire but cannot have, and this tends to strengthen the desire as well as the feeling of frustration; but if you refuse to gaze at it—if you turn your vision away from it, even though you cannot turn your interest away—you are doing something, however little, towards controlling the desire and reducing the sense of frustration.

Again, you tend to raise your voice when annoyed, and the louder voice is the effect of the feeling of annoyance; but if by an effort of will you keep your voice at its normal level you are doing a certain amount towards the control of the annoyance itself.

The point of this is that the external manifestations of desires and emotions are integral parts of these desires and emotions, and by inhibiting their outer effects you are helping to weaken their inner causes—provided of course you do so mindfully. While it is true that these things work primarily from the inside outwards, it is true also that to some extent they work from the outside inwards.

Now let us consider the manner in which you can best apply self-discipline in your daily life. Perhaps the biggest

problem in any form of mental culture is not the problem of mastering its principles but that of applying them. One system may be based on psychological theories, another on philosophical or religious concepts; one may be clear-cut and another vague and indefinite; but in most cases the greater difficulty is found not in understanding the principles involved, but in using the practises in the routine of everyday life.

If you lead a too-busy life, with responsibilities and duties bearing down on you, you may feel that your endeavours to develop your own mental potentialities are thwarted by all these external pressures. But if you could miraculously be freed from your problems and frustrations you would also be deprived of the very best opportunities for mindfulness, self-discipline, and other forms of mental culture. Your philosophy and policy of life are worth nothing to you if you cannot weave them into the fabric of your daily living. If, however, they are at all exacting and if they demand from you any degree of self-discipline, it is admittedly not easy to do this.

There is, however, a method whereby you can apply self-discipline in the routine of your everyday life and which involves little if any expenditure of valuable time.

At this point, however, I must make it clear that this method of self-discipline which I am about to place before you is not a traditional Buddhist method; it a system which I have worked out and applied to my own life. In my early

acquaintance with Buddhist ideals and the principles of a similar kind, I found that it was quite easy to talk about them when life was flowing smoothly, but quite as difficult to apply them—or even to call them to mind—when problems arose. For this reason I searched for some way to turn my philosophy into a policy and this policy into a technique. As a result I evolved what I call the self-contract method of self-discipline.

In using this method, you take in hand some adverse tendency which you wish to correct, some habit you wish to break, or some habit you wish to form, and at the same time you select some small pleasure in which you normally indulge.

You then make a sort of pact or contract with yourself to the effect that, soon after each occasion on which you fail to control the adverse tendency or habit, you will deny yourself the small pleasure you have selected.

To take a concrete example, let us assume that you are absent-minded. This, of course, is simply a lack of all-round mindfulness, for although particular forms of mindfulness have certain specialised functions, a general all-round mindfulness is essential for efficient living.

If you lack this all-round mindfulness, you will find yourself mislaying small things such as your keys, or your reading glasses, or your pencil. You will have to search all your pockets or empty out your handbag to find your railway ticket. You will carefully write someone's telephone

number on a slip of paper and then just as carelessly lose it.

In this you will have a great deal in common with most other people. Most of us lack all-round mindfulness and therefore most of us would benefit by some self-training in this respect.

Let us assume, then, that you wish to correct this adverse tendency—this lack of all-round mindfulness. Let us assume also that you smoke cigarettes.

You therefore make a contract with yourself along these lines: "I resolve that after each time I neglect to be mindful in small matters I will go without a cigarette for at least two hours."

Now you will note that this is not merely a resolution to form a new habit; it is something more. If you make a simple resolution without a self-imposed deprivation it is likely to fail, either because you will forget it, or because you will soon decide that absent-mindedness is not such a bad fault after all, or, more likely, because there are too many other matters demanding your attention.

With a self-imposed deprivation, however, the contract which you make with yourself has a great deal more force than a simple resolution, by virtue of the self-imposed deprivation.

At first sight, the deprivation may seem to be a form of self-punishment. This is not its function, however, for it must never be severe enough to be felt as a punishment, and if it

were to be felt as a punishment it would tend to defeat its own purpose.

You must regard the deprivation, not as a penalty, but purely as an aid to mindfulness, a help in breaking free from the unthinking drift of life, and a device to give force to your resolution. As such, it must never be allowed to become irksome or unduly restrictive; it must always remain flexible and readily modified, for once you make it too difficult you will tend to throw it aside and forget all about it.

All that you require your self-discipline to do is to exert a gentle and fairly continuous pressure in order to give you greater awareness of your habits, desires, and reactions to circumstances.

To make the self-contract system of discipline work you must begin by forming a new habit. This new habit is that of mentally pausing each time you are about to indulge in the small pleasure—whatever it may be—that you have selected as the basis for your self-contract.

If it happens to be cigarette-smoking, as your hand is about to open the packet your mind must learn to pause to consider whether or not your self-contract allows you a cigarette at this time.

If you have agreed with yourself to take your tea or coffee without sugar after an occasion of lack of mindfulness, then you must train yourself to think back each time before reaching for the sugar basin.

If you like to eat chocolates and have made a pact to deprive yourself of them after being absent-minded, then you must form the habit of pausing to think back before eating them.

It is, in fact, possible to set off one habit against another and so develop greater control over both, but in any case the deprivation must be regarded mainly as an aid to mindfulness and must therefore remain flexible. In another system of self-discipline, perhaps, you might be required to make a more exacting imposition on yourself; but since the method we are discussing is primarily a means of handling small and apparently insignificant failings without interfering with the busy workaday routine, a rigid and severe system of self-discipline would be inappropriate.

If you yourself decide to take on this system of mental culture you would of course have to adapt it to your own requirements and your own mode of life. This would probably apply particularly to the self-imposed deprivations that you would use, and those will depend on your likes and dislikes.

Perhaps you neither smoke cigarettes, nor have sugar in your tea or coffee, nor eat chocolates. But however austere your life may be there must be some small pleasure that you enjoy—or even some small activity that you carry out—with some degree of regularity; and whatever it is you can use it as a basis for the self-contract method of self-discipline.

As opposed to self-deprivation, the idea of self-rewarding is sometimes suggested as a basis for a system of discipline. In

general, however, self-appointed rewards do not work as well as self-imposed deprivations.

For example, if you already eat whatever you want whenever you want it, by rewarding yourself with something you like to eat you will find yourself over-eating, or if you already smoke whenever you feel like it, by rewarding yourself with an extra cigarette you will find yourself smoking when you do not really want to do so, and so you will be effecting little or nothing. Only if you are already restricting your eating and smoking will a self-rewarding basis in these things be effective.

However, you may sometimes offset a self-imposed deprivation by a self-appointed reward, so that one cancels the other. Everyone's life and circumstances vary from everyone else's, and a system that fails in one person's case may work in another.

What has been written above forms a general introduction to mindfulness combined with self-discipline as a basis for mental culture. With this basis, fortified by an increasing understanding of life—of the ways in which living beings act and react—you can lay the foundation for an efficient technique of living.

In order to help you to build on this foundation, I have compiled a course which is designed to extend over a period of a year. It consists of a series of sections one for each month, on various aspects of mental culture, each with a basic exercise in either mindfulness, self-understanding, or

self-discipline. The course is called “A Technique of Living,” and this section forms the introduction to it.

In the main, but not entirely, the practises are based on Buddhist psychological principles. The practises do not however, include exercises which require an appreciable amount of time, nor are the principles involved of a particularly profound nature.

If you wish to take on what is loosely called meditation and to study Buddhist principles in their deeper forms, a good deal of literature is available on the subject; but such practises and study do not lie within the scope of this course. All of the practises in this course are designed to be woven into the fabric of the workaday routine.

Although one month is given to each section of the course, you will almost certainly find that a month is too short to establish it as a well-founded habit, and you will probably need to repeat the series during the following year. In fact, there is no reason why you should not continue with the practises in sequence indefinitely on a yearly cycle.

While each one of the twelve lessons is assigned to one particular month, you may commence the course at any time of the year.

In taking on any system of self-training, the main problem, as already stated, is not the matter of understanding its principles but that of applying its practises; and even then, once you have made a start, there is always the possibility that you will discontinue it.

If you are practising it alone, you may tend to lose interest. If, however, you can form a discussion-group with three or four friends with similar interests, the opportunity to compare notes and to discuss progress and mutual problems will provide a good incentive to continue with the practises.

[Top]

The First Month

The Practise of Relaxation

It has been said that life is too serious to be taken seriously. We might enlarge on this by saying that life is so serious and so unsatisfactory that by becoming resistant and tense about it we merely make it more serious. In other words, tension increases the seriousness of things.

Not everyone shares this view that life is so serious and unsatisfactory. For some, the continual search for personal gratification is relatively successful, and they feel that they're getting something a little better than the usual fifty-fifty mixture of pleasure and displeasure, a little more rest than effort, a little more happiness than sorrow. This is all they expect and they are reasonably satisfied with it.

There are others who get something worse than the average fifty-fifty mixture of happiness and sorrow; life deals out to them less pleasure than pain, and they must give out more than they receive. They must make great efforts and enjoy little rest, and their sorrow outweighs their happiness. Their unremitting efforts to extract from life more than it can yield

create a general state of tension that makes life still more serious.

Those of us who are tense, it seems, outnumber those who are relaxed; but few realise just how tense they are and just how this tension is spoiling things for them.

How does tension arise in the first place? To begin with you must realise that tension is necessary under certain conditions. If you're in a dangerous situation the natural reaction is to tense your muscles; your whole physical mechanism is then geared up for escaping or fighting. This reaction has been instrumental in survival and the processes of tensing the muscles together with the physical changes that take place throughout the body are necessary in special situations.

But this is where the trouble lies. You can't fully turn off the tension; you find that you're always tense, even when there is no occasion for it.

Thus you see that while tension is useful under some conditions, it's not necessary for twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week.

Before we go any further we must ask ourselves this: what do we mean by tension? We know that by muscular tension we mean a state in which some of our muscles are partly contracted and the nerves controlling them are ready to produce a further contraction at an instant's notice.

But what do we mean by mental tension? Our minds control

the nerves that lead to our muscles, so that if these nerves are in a continual state of readiness it's because our minds are acting as if they were continually expecting some emergency suddenly to develop.

Your mind is in a state of alertness due to anxiety, resentment, or self-assertion. In some situations the alertness is commendable and useful, but when long sustained it's generally pointless, without an object, and—worst of all—beyond the immediate control of your consciousness. It's controlled from mental levels inaccessible to consciousness rather than by the higher conscious functions of your mind.

The precipitating causes of your inward tension lie in the outer world, it's true; they lie in your need to earn a living, in your family obligations, and in the demands made upon you to compete for prestige; but the real causes lie in yourself. The real causes of tension lie, firstly, in the anxiety you feel when something you value is threatened; secondly, in the resentment you build up towards those that threaten your valued things and your self-importance; and thirdly, in the need you feel constantly to assert yourself.

Let's look at these three basic causes of tension one at a time. The first is anxiety, and this arises when anything you value is threatened. The more things you desire the more vulnerable you make yourself to the onset of anxiety. While anxiety is related to various emotional factors, concern for your own well-being or for the well-being of your near ones

and possessions is its main foundation. In Buddhist psychology this concern arises from self-centred desire, which embraces not only the grosser manifestations of desire such as avarice and stinginess but all of its less obvious forms.

The second basic tension-causing mental factor is resentment. Since in the full course of his life the average person meets so many annoyances and frustrations, he builds up an aversion towards the things and people that seemingly cause them.

Because this aversion—in its mild as well as in its intense manifestations—is as a general rule neither fully expressed nor fully resolved, it remains to simmer and smoulder in the form of resentment.

The third of the basic mental causes of tension is the false need you feel constantly to assert yourself, to gain and retain prestige, and to maintain a sense of self-importance even at the expense of self-deceit. You can easily see it in others when it appears in its blatant forms, but as it exists in yourself you're seldom aware of it. In Buddhist psychology it's called delusion, since the self you constantly assert is unreal when understood in ultimate terms; and all your tendencies towards self-assertion (as well as your feelings both of self-importance and of inferiority) are all parts of this deeply-rooted delusion.

Thus we see that, according to the Buddha-doctrine, all mental unhappiness springs from self-centred desire,

aversion, and delusion. As we're considering them here as tension-causing factors, desire is expressed as anxiety, aversion is expressed as resentment, and delusion is expressed as self-assertion.

Now until you've developed self-understanding, you're not fully aware of the real causes of your anxiety; you're not completely conscious of your resentment; nor again do you really know the full extent of your self-assertion. Thus you're unable properly to deal with unwanted tension.

Tension manifests in the body as well as in the mind. Thus arises the need to deal with the problem of tension not only at the higher level of the mind but also at the lower level of the body, particularly in the voluntary muscles.

A Buddhist exercise called posture-mindfulness can be readily adapted for the purpose of bodily relaxation. The essence of the adapted practise of posture-mindfulness is to give special attention to the various muscle-groups of the body, searching for unwanted tension in the muscles and consciously relaxing them. You can use posture-mindfulness for purposes of relaxation whenever your mind is free from other concerns, but perhaps the best time is before you settle down to sleep each night.

Having assumed a comfortable posture, you let the focus of consciousness move slowly several times from one side to the other across your forehead and eyebrows, keeping in mind the idea that you want the muscles concerned to relax or to become limp instead of tight. You can assist the effect

by saying mentally ”relax, relax” during the process. You may not at first recognise any tension in the forehead and eyebrows, for it may have become so habitual that it feels quite normal. Even so, the quiet application of consciousness to the muscles will do a great deal towards removing any tension that does exist there.

Then you allow the focus of consciousness to move over and around one eye, across the eyelid, and then behind the eye where so many delicate muscles are located. Then you take the attention across to the other eye and move it around, across, and behind it.

Tension is often more evident in the mouth and jaws than elsewhere. Thus when you move the focus of consciousness to your mouth and jaws you may become definitely aware of tension, manifested by clenched teeth and a firmly-set mouth. You slowly apply increased mindfulness to the muscles concerned, and the idea of relaxation which you’re all the while keeping in mind will cause the tension to disappear or at least to diminish.

Now you apply the same degree of attention to your tongue, relaxing it as well as you can and allowing it to become as limp as possible. It may be necessary to spend more time on the mouth, jaw, and tongue than on other parts of the body.

Next you carry the centre of attention down to the neck, spiralling it around and up and down several times. You then do the same to the muscles of the shoulders.

From the shoulders you take the focus of consciousness down one arm, spiralling around and along it and searching for tense muscles. When you reach the hand, it's best to take the back of the hand and then each finger one at a time, trying to become aware of each one separately.

You then let your attention flow on to the thigh of the same side, moving down in a spiral to the knee, the lower part of the leg, and the foot.

From there you can move across to the other foot, spiralling up that leg and thigh to the hand of that side. For many of us it's not necessary to spend a great deal of time on the muscles of the legs and feet, since the tension doesn't usually appear there as much as in other muscle groups.

With the hands, however, it's different, for here there may often be considerable tension. In its extreme form this may show itself in clenched fists.

Therefore, after the focus of attention has travelled down one leg and up the other, when it reaches the hand of the second side it's wise to slow up the movement of consciousness and to give individual attention to each finger as before, to the back of the hand, and to the wrist, and then to spiral the focus of consciousness up the arm to the shoulder.

You've now encircled the body from the head down one arm and one leg to the foot, and back again via the foot, the leg and the arm on the other side. There remain the muscles of the chest and the abdomen. You therefore give attention

to the sensations in the upper part of the chest, moving the focus of attention across the chest, around the back, and again across the chest, spiralling downwards until you reach the muscles of the abdomen.

This completes the basic adaptation of posture-mindfulness for the purpose of muscular and nervous relaxation. You may vary it, abbreviate it, or extend it, according to your needs and conditions; but in any form the practise just described is a good foundation for the removal of body tension and, to a certain extent, for the easing of mental tension also.

Apart from Buddhism, you find that both Eastern and Western systems of relaxation employ techniques, which are basically the same as this method.

It is generally considered that in the best form of the practise, you should lie, not in bed, but on the floor, fiat on the back and with the arms lying limply by the sides, for the non-yielding floor allows you to detect tense muscles more readily than does the soft bed. The only reason why this muscular relaxation method has been described as being practised whilst in bed rather than when lying on the floor is because, for most of us, the day is so full of other things that it's not until we go to bed that we can find the time to carry out the practise.

Now while the mindful and systematic application of consciousness to tense muscles is generally effective in relaxing them, they may soon afterwards become just as

tense again. What you must do, then, is to do consciously what for so long you've been doing subconsciously. You must consciously and deliberately tense the muscles so as to make the tension-process accessible to consciousness and to remove it from the realm of subconscious activity,

Therefore you proceed to stiffen or tense the muscles concerned, mindfully feeling the sensations of tension, and then you slowly release the tension, all the while giving attention to the feeling of decreasing tension and increasing relaxation. By this means the conscious aspects of the mind gradually take over functions which were hitherto subconsciously controlled.

Starting with your forehead and eyebrows, you consciously frown and slowly relax. Then you consciously open your eyes widely and stare at nothing, and slowly close them and relax the muscles around them. You grit your teeth and then slowly relax your jaws by attending to the muscles of your face, especially those around your mouth. Similarly you tense your tongue and relax it. When you come to your neck, you stiffen it, move your head rigidly forwards, backwards, and from side to side a little, afterwards slowly letting it become as limp as possible. You then hunch your shoulders forward, draw them stiffly back, and then slowly relax them. And so on throughout other muscle groups.

You may have to carry out this alternation of contracting and relaxing a muscle group many times in the one session before it becomes effective. Sometimes, in the early stages of

learning the relaxation technique, it's better occasionally to devote a whole session to only one set of muscles.

In this connection the device of verbalised thought is very helpful. In using this device, you repeat mentally the name of the part of the body whose muscles you are attending to and also tell yourself mentally when you are tensing them and when you are relaxing them. Thus you say mentally: "Jaws … tense … relax. Cheek … tense … relax. Mouth … tense … relax." This verbalising process helps to keep out unwanted trains of thought.

A system (of non-Buddhist origin) of assisting to relieve mental tension consists of visualising black objects or shapes. Thinking of blackness is the nearest you can ordinarily get to thinking of nothing, and thus to the exclusion of unwanted or disturbing thoughts.

It makes little difference what kind of black image you form; you can imagine a black disc, and you can make this disc grow larger and larger, or you can let it change to an octagon, a square, and a triangle. Or again, you can imagine that you're painting everything in the room black stage by stage.

So long as blackness is the predominant idea, the process will help to relax the mind.

Practical Work:

For this period your work consists of establishing the practise of relaxation as a habit. Resolve to undertake the

practise on at least four occasions each week; or—particularly if you feel a special need for it—once a day. If you can carry out the practise whilst lying on the floor, all the better, otherwise you can adapt it for use when in bed before settling down to sleep at night. Try to keep ten or twenty minutes free for this purpose.

Use the self-contract method of self-discipline and impose on yourself some small penalty whenever you fail to keep to your resolution.

[Top]

The Second Month

Basic Principles of Self-Understanding

You'll agree, no doubt, that one of the most important things in your mental life is self-understanding. You'll agree also that most of us have much too little self-understanding and therefore need some sort of training along these lines. And, further, you'll realise that we all possess a natural and inherent tendency towards self-deceit.

It seems that each of us in the ordinary way has a sense of "ego," an unreasoned conviction that he's a distinct ego or self, unique and separate from the rest of life.

In some cases, you find a person whose sense of ego is so strong that he finds it necessary at all costs to feel the rightness of everything he does and the rightness of everything he says, as well as the rightness of everything he possesses. When he can feel this rightness (and too often it's a false rightness), then he feels superior. When he can't feel this rightness he feels inferior and inadequate and thus he develops various complexes and neurotic trends.

Because of this false need to feel a false rightness, he must

continually deceive himself in various subtle ways; he must pretend to himself that his motives are better than they are, and he must repress all unwelcome knowledge about himself and about all things that are his.

All this, just to keep his sense of ego intact.

Now on the other hand there are those who have learnt honestly to recognise their own deficiencies and just as honestly to evaluate their own virtues. These few have made some progress in self-understanding.

Most of us, however, stand somewhere between these two extremes, While we're not entirely free from self-deceit we haven't attained to complete self-understanding; we need, therefore, to develop and to practise some kind of psychological technique directed towards an increase in self-knowledge.

One of the difficulties we find is that we treasure some of our irrational loves and hatreds; we cling to our emotional biases and try not to lose our complexes. Because we've grown up with them we've become attached to them. In some way or other these irrational loves and hatreds, biases, and complexes seem to provide a barrier against something we prefer not to face. This barrier has been called the "dread of enlightenment."

This dread of enlightenment is to be found to a greater or less extent in all of us except the few who have attained a considerable degree of self-honesty. Thus it's probable that, in common with the majority of people, you tend to resist

the process of self-analysis because it demands that you let go of these treasured evils. You resist the process of disentangling the web of attachment.

Why is this so? Why do you prefer self-deceit to self-knowledge? Not only do these irrationalities give you a barrier against mental factors that you don't wish to face, but they also give you a kind of individual character, a sort of distinction that helps to build up your sense of being different from others.

Another reason is that you want to retain unaltered all those concepts connected with the things you love. If you subject any of your emotion-laden concepts to the scrutiny of self-analysis you may have to alter it, and in altering it you may need to apply effort. It's much more comfortable to leave things as they are.

It's much the same with the things you hate or dislike; if you subject your concepts of these things to the strong clear light of self-examination you may have to prove yourself wrong, and to relinquish your hates and dislikes requires a great deal of adjustment. Again, it's more comfortable to leave things as they are.

Self-analysis may sometimes turn out to be temporarily very painful. What, then, is the point of it all? If you can be just as happy without self-understanding, why bother?

This, of course, is like saying since you are quite comfortable in your dark cave, why bother to build a house with windows? Once your mind becomes firmly established

in its habits, the general trend of awareness becomes less acute and your whole mentality becomes less adaptable. It tends to become more lethargic and to resist change.

Then you think more emotionally—that is to say, more subjectively and less objectively. You become disturbed with less cause, your judgement is more likely to be impaired, you lose your poise more readily, and your self-control crumbles easily. All this, when you prefer self-ignorance to self-understanding.

What is needed, then, in order to break down self-deceit and to increase self-understanding? Buddhism offers the principle of right mindfulness.

You'll find this principle of right mindfulness to be simple enough in its general concept; it's primarily the development or cultivation of the ordinary normal faculty of attention; it's applied to many different fields of experience, but in particular it needs to be directed inwardly. In this sense, mindfulness can be described mainly as self-observation.

While simple enough in its general concept as the cultivation of attention, there are so many fields of experience to which you can apply mindfulness that the whole sphere of mindfulness becomes very comprehensive.

For example, ordinary everyday activities—those of work, family life, and leisure, for example—offer a broad scope for increased self-understanding. With regard to your ordinary actions, the Buddhist system states that you must have a

clear comprehension of your own motives and purposes. Without this clear comprehension you may be caught in the unthinking drift.

You know, of course, your own motives behind many of the things you do. But it may be, with some other things you do, that you do them merely because other people do them. If so, on self-examination, you'll find that you do these things largely to gain the approval of the people with whom you associate. The mind feels a need to retain a sense of importance and superiority, and to keep this sense of importance and superiority intact it must employ self-deceit in various forms. And to discover your real motives, you must learn to break through this self-deceit. The clear comprehension of motive, then, is one of the major aspects of self-understanding.

It may be that you have a clear comprehension of your overall motive in life, of your ultimate purpose, or it may be that you have no sense of purpose and perhaps no ultimate purpose at all; yet some sense of purpose is necessary for progress. Mindfulness in the form of self-observation is a forward step in the process of gaining a purpose in life and of becoming aware of what that purpose is.

You, in common with mankind as a whole, have inherited an emotional jungle, a profuse and tangled growth of greeds and hatreds existing side by side with more noble tendencies. It's a natural tendency—even though poor psychology—to try to ignore the vicious elements of the

mind, and this is how self-deceit arises.

In its early stages, self-deceit is a refusal to recognise these vicious elements of the mind; but at a more advanced stage it may become a complete inability—much more than a conscious refusal—to recognise them. Sometimes the mind plays tricks on itself in order to keep undamaged its sense of rightness and superiority, and these tricks serve to hide its real motives and desires.

Sometimes the mind twists and distorts the meanings of experiences; it avoids thoughts which offend it and which show it up to itself in an unfavourable light, and it diverts its attention from unwanted thoughts to those which bring out its pleasanter aspects.

Psychology knows these tricks as the mental mechanisms, such as the mechanisms of avoidance, divertance, and fixation. Another aspect of self-observation is concerned with the sensations as they're received through the various sense organs and as they're perceived in the mind with special regard to their pleasure-pain content.

The point about sensation in relation to its pleasure-pain content is that it's at this level that attachment has its origin; and attachment is a major cause of unhappiness. All things in the world change; all things arise and pass away; and the more you become attached to anything at all the more you will suffer when you lose it.

To control attachment, therefore, you must keep watch at the door of sensation. As you become more critically aware

of all your experiences at the level of sensation, you learn to prevent the pleasure in one and the pain in another from taking control. That is, instead of being controlled by your pleasures and pains, you learn to pass through them without being swept away by them.

It's when you allow your pleasures and pains at the sensational level to dominate you that you become swept away by your emotions, pleasant and painful; and you're then fully enmeshed in the web of attachment. And then you're incapable of objective reasoning and wise decisions.

You can see, then, that it is desirable to train yourself to keep a critical watch on your experiences at the level of sensation, and just as critically to evaluate the pleasures and pains at this level. You can extend this objective self-observation, then, to the factors that go to make up your mental state.

According to the Buddha-doctrine, there are three basic mental factors that retard the mind's progress. One of these is called selfish desire; it exists in various forms such as greed and possessiveness, and it may be either intense on the one hand or mild and unobtrusive on the other. Then there is aversion, which we find also in the guise of anger, hatred, resentment, and irritability. And the third is called delusion, and this also appears in different forms, principally as self-assertion and self-deceit.

The observation of the mental state, then, is a form of mindfulness whose objective is to shine the full light of

consciousness on to these "roots of evil," as they are called, and onto all mental factors derived from them and allied with them. These include not only such factors as envy, conceit, and stinginess, but also rigidity of mind, morbid remorse, and restlessness or agitation.

When, by self-examination, you become aware of these adverse tendencies, you are of course more able to deal with them, and the very realisation that they exist will often act as a controlling factor.

However, it's desirable to discover and uncover not only your adverse and retarding mental elements, but also your good qualities, because these need to be nurtured and developed as instruments of progress.

You can see, then, that the principle of mindfulness can be of value to you in various ways; it can help you to avoid the traps laid for you by your own pleasures and pains. And it can help you to evaluate your progress in breaking down the retarding elements in your own mind and in developing the progressing elements.

While development along such lines is largely a matter of self-observation, and while this is of the utmost importance, it can well be supplemented by observation directed outwardly. That is to say, the observation of other people, together with the understanding that comes from this observation, can be of great value in the task of observing yourself.

In fact, this works both ways; as you observe your own

behaviour and learn to know your own motives better, you see this behaviour reflected in other people, and their motives become more transparent to you. In the same way, as you learn to interpret other people's behaviour in terms of their motives (sometimes hidden from them), so your own motives become more transparent to yourself.

So you see that the Buddhist approach to self-understanding is by way of mindfulness, directed primarily internally, and secondarily externally; or in other words by the critical observation of yourself and the penetrating but kindly observation of others.

Practical Work: The Practise of Inwardly-Directed Mindfulness

While the extravert directs his attention mainly to the external world around him, one who is introverted tends to neglect this objective observation of his external world. He is concerned, not so much with what is happening, but with his own emotional reactions as well as his own likes and dislikes of what is happening.

This form of introversion brings with it subjective thinking, and carried to extremes it becomes pathological. Objective thinking, with its clear evaluation of facts and conditions,

becomes impossible when emotional thinking of this kind takes over.

Now in view of this it may appear strange that Buddhism advises a kind of introversion—an "inward turning"—as a part of the technique of right mindfulness; but it is an introversion of a completely different sort. It is a process in which the mind is trained to turn inward on itself, but in an objective manner instead of in the emotional way of the other kind of introversion.

Your practical work for this month, therefore, consists of forming the habit of objective and unemotional self-observation, taking in your mental processes as a whole.

In other exercises in this series you take specific retarding tendencies and watch for their appearance. For example, in the Third Month you look for false valuations, in the Sixth Month for undue anxiety, and in the Seventh Month for irritability and resentment, while in the Eighth Month you watch for self-assertive tendencies.

During this month, however, the work is not so much the observation of specific retarding elements; it is more a matter of watching for that subjective type of thought that is governed by emotional bias and prejudice. It's a process of replacing one type of introversion by another, or replacing emotional thinking by self-analysis.

Assuming that you are working on a self-contract basis, at the end of each day, or at some convenient time, you can think back to see whether your introvert tendencies have

taken a constructive and analytical form, or whether you have allowed yourself to become emotionally dominated. You can then enforce your self-contract accordingly.
[Top]

The Third Month

The Process of Revaluation

If you think back, you'll most likely find that many of the values you now place on things have been established, in part at least, by outside influences; by your parents, for example, and by your teachers, and by the books you were given to read in your earlier years. Added to these are the entertainments you enjoyed then and those you enjoy now, the opinions of your friends, and the vicious and continuous blare of advertisements. Thus very little of your thinking is really your own.

As a result of all this, you are saddled with many false valuations, valuations which are not your own because you haven't arrived at them by a process of independent thinking. They may be good valuations in some sense or other or they may not, but they have been imposed on you from outside and have not been developed within you by your own thought.

To examine your own valuations and, where desirable, to break free from them—assuming, of course, that there's a

need to do so—you must exert a sustained effort of mindfulness.

The first work of mindfulness in this connection is to make you aware of your false valuations, in order to help you to realise what is of real value and what is useless mental baggage. As the realisation of false valuations takes hold, new valuations of things tend to take their place as a natural process.

You will agree that what you most highly value will largely determine what you most ardently strive for; and, conversely, what you most ardently strive for is an indication of what you most highly value.

The infantile mind arrives at its beliefs and opinions by imitating others, or else by the impact of authority (and often of spurious authority), but it is only the most mature mind that evaluates things by the process of independent thinking.

In the same way, while the infantile mind formulates its code of values by superficial and immediate considerations, the mature mind takes a long-range view of all things, and penetrates to the ultimate values of things as distinct from their present effects.

The process of revaluation is a slow one, for most of the ideals of the world around us run counter to the true values that we seek.

You will usually find that the opinions of those around you,

your obligations to your dependants, and your need to conform—outwardly at least—to other people's standards, all act as obstacles to the inner process of correcting your scale of values. You find that you are forced to spend time in many ways on things that, left to yourself, you would consider insignificant, while you may unwillingly have to give too little time to things of greater ultimate value.

Often you may be led into valueless byways because of economic necessity or social pressure; and this fact you must generally accept, because it's easier to adapt yourself to the world than to adapt the world to yourself. Often, too, there are some futile activities you may take on in the search for excitement or in an endeavour to escape from boredom; and these too, although futile by ultimate standards, are sometimes useful in providing an immediate purpose. But when such activities and interests grow out of proportion they retard your progress simply because of the time and energy they consume.

From the Buddhist viewpoint many such false valuations arise from craving, from that incessant thirst for personal gratification that springs from ignorance. With craving and ignorance at the root of all personal life, false valuations are inevitable, and to break down these false valuations it is necessary to attack them at the deeper levels of the mind.

Now the basic ignorance, in the Buddhist sense, is the inability to know the true nature of existence, just as blindness is not merely not seeing but the inability to see.

This basic ignorance is ultimately found to be the root of all suffering, and the whole of the Buddha-way is a course of self-training directed towards knowing, knowing it its fullest sense.

Stating this in another way, the final aim of the Buddha-way is enlightenment, the breaking down of ignorance.

* * *

One of the characteristics of existence as emphasised by the Buddha-doctrine is that of impermanence. It needs no profound thought to show that all things arise, last a longer or shorter time, and finally pass out of existence; and to labour the point may seem unnecessary. But do you really accept this fact of impermanence? Does it affect your valuations of things? Or does it pass over your head? Perhaps you do accept it up to a point, but generally it needs a tremendous emotional jolt to bring it right home.

To the extent that you accept the fact of impermanence you relinquish some of your futile valuations because you realise their futility. It has been pointed out that the harder you grasp a handful of water the more of it slips through your fingers, for the best way to hold water in the hand is to hold it loosely. And in the same way, the best way to hold anything in the mind is to hold it loosely. Thus, slowly, you learn to grasp things a little less tightly; but for a long time you continue to grasp, and thus continue to lose.

If only you could stop grasping, if only you could relinquish the wish that the transient would become permanent, then

you could enjoy the pleasure while it lasts and be ready for the next experience when it comes, whether it be one of happiness or of sorrow. By one approach to life you increase its unsatisfactoriness by seeking to prolong your pleasures, while by the other way you leave yourself free to gain the fullest value from every experience.

Whatever experience life brings to you, whether bitter or sweet, it has some value if you use it skilfully, and you can use it skilfully only if you take it when it comes and accept its imperfections.

The Buddha-doctrine points out that, within personal life, everything is imperfect, everything is ultimately unsatisfactory. Nowhere within the sphere of personal life is permanent happiness to be found, and only by attaining to the "existence beyond existence," only by breaking free from the bondage of selfhood, can permanent freedom from suffering be found.

The more comfortable are your external conditions, the less incentive is there to make an effort towards the final enlightenment. The more comfortably you pad out the walls of the cell of your own personal life, the less you will feel its shocks and jolts. But is this comfortable upholstery of any ultimate value? A padded cell is still a cell, and all the padding can never give you freedom.

Not only so, but the padding eventually wears thin, and the question arises: which requires less effort—to keep on re-padding the cell, or to fight your way to freedom? It has

been said:

"The wise man obtains liberation by a hundredth part of the suffering that a foolish man endures in the pursuit of riches."

The Buddha-doctrine affirms that there is no permanent freedom from suffering and unsatisfactoriness within the bondage of personal life, and that while you are perpetuating the delusion of selfhood you are perpetuating suffering.

Further, the Buddha-doctrine emphasises that the self is a delusion, and that life is one indivisible whole. Thus everything you gain at the expense of another's loss is of no ultimate value; the gain is transitory and eventually becomes a burden to carry. If you gain by knowingly depriving another of something, you eventually become the real loser. Every self-centred valuation carries within itself the seeds of sorrow.

It is, of course, often very difficult to detect the self-centred valuation behind your desires and actions. If you're influenced by a possessive valuation, in which your aim is to possess more and more property or material objects, the element of self is quite obvious in the motive; but the same possessive valuation might apply just as definitely but much less obviously in your attachment to your own children in the guise of love. In this guise it can cause more unhappiness than when it applies to material things.

This same possessive valuation is often at the back of love

problems, for many love problems are not so much concerned with love in its higher meaning as with possessiveness, at least in part.

Then there is what we can call the aesthetic valuation. Here, when applying a penetrating self-analysing mindfulness, you might find that your high appreciation of art, music, or one of these finer and less mundane things, is really a means of bolstering up your own self-esteem. No doubt this appreciation of finer things really exists, but its virtues are often vitiated when it is used as a means of asserting your own superiority.

The same may be said of the intellectual valuation, in which scientific knowledge, an intellectual grasp of a subject, or a love of hair-splitting argument provides a means of self-assertion.

It may be just the same with a religious valuation or a highly moral valuation—there may be a good deal of self present in the form of self-righteousness.

Even when there's a predominance of altruism in the major valuation, it may be possible to find an element of self-interest in the shape of a desire for admiration or thanks, or perhaps a feeling of self-approval.

In the process of revaluation, then, from the Buddhist viewpoint, you must first adopt a philosophy which emphasises fundamentals rather than superficialities and places ultimate effects higher than immediate ones; then you must recognise and assess your own dominant

valuation; and finally you must progressively move the point of interest away from self-interest and towards the interest of life as a whole.

In order to work from the inside outwards, you must gradually work on your valuations of things in general. This means that you must become increasingly aware of your false values, and, with this increased awareness you must progressively discard these false values.

In time, then, you'll find that many things which previously aroused your anger, resentment, possessiveness and other adverse emotions will then fail to do so. You will then move your focus of interest away from the things that arouse these retarding emotions, away from the emotions that retard your progress.

This, of course, will in general be a long and continuous process, and one that involves many readjustments of the values you now place on all sorts of things.

Practical Work: The Practise of All-round Mindfulness

We can use various synonyms for mindfulness. We can speak of it as expanded awareness and intensified awareness, as increased attentiveness, and in a certain sense as presence of mind. Lack of mindfulness, similarly, can be

referred to as unawareness, inattentiveness, and absence of mind.

In this last-mentioned expression—absence of mind—we can each recognise lack of mindfulness both in ourselves and in others. Putting aside for the present the more profound aspects of mindfulness, let us consider its application to the more mundane and superficial matters of the workaday life.

You are familiar with a situation in which you are writing a letter when the telephone rings in the next room. On your way to answer the telephone you put your pen down somewhere—but where? When you return to your letter writing you're unable to remember where you put your pen, and you have to waste time in searching for it. You may feel that this kind of absentmindedness is unimportant except for the exasperation and inconvenience it causes; but the point is that if you have too little mindfulness to observe where you put your pen, you must also have too little to make much progress on the path of self-development.

You may consider that the example just given doesn't apply to you. However, you would probably find a number of minor situations in your own life in which you could profitably employ greater presence of mind. This increased mindfulness will give you greater efficiency, but this is only its secondary objective; its primary aim is to increase your inner alertness.

For a period of a month or longer, then, set out to develop a

greater degree of all-round mindfulness in the small routine activities of your life. To do this it will be helpful if you slow down these activities whenever you can and do them more deliberately and attentively. This slowing-down will help to establish more mindful patterns of thought and action which—if continued over a long enough period—will extend or infiltrate into other activities, activities which must of necessity be carried out more hurriedly.

It is helpful if you increase your awareness of your actions by verbalisation. For example, as you put your pen down, say to yourself "I put my pen on top of the book-case." Or having bought a bus ticket and put it in your pocket, say, "The ticket is in my left-hand side pocket." This form of verbalisation assists in the general development of all-round mindfulness. It would be pointless to try to apply it to too many things, but it's especially useful in relation to the few small activities in which you happen to be absentminded.

One way in which you can apply the self-contract method to this discipline is to make a mental note of each time you act absent-mindedly. For each occasion of absent-mindedness mentally note one point; and, when you reach a total of, say, ten points, make the next twenty-four hours a discipline day.

You will need to define just what you yourself mean by a discipline day. It may mean that you'll smoke only half your usual number of cigarettes, or that you'll go without sugar in your tea, or that you'll eat no sweet biscuits during the

twenty-four hours.

The exact nature of the pact you make with yourself is unimportant, so long as you use it to increase your general level of awareness.

[Top]

The Fourth Month

The Path of Increasing Awareness

From certain viewpoints it can be said that the evolution of the mind consists largely in the intensification of awareness on the one hand, and, on the other, the expansion of awareness.

Let's consider it in this way. In some situations awareness needs to be intensified but not expanded. If you're carrying out a difficult repair on a delicate piece of mechanism, such as a watch, your consciousness needs to be concentrated and you need to be aware of only a limited range of sense-impressions, covering only those relevant to the work in hand and excluding all others. That is to say, your awareness must be intensified but not expanded.

In other circumstances your consciousness needs to take in a very broad field of sense-impressions. If you're driving a car in heavy traffic, for example, it is very necessary to be conscious of a large range of sense-impressions without generally concentrating on any one of them. You need to be aware of the car ahead, of pedestrians crossing the road, of

vehicles coming towards you or darting out of side streets, and of anything and everything that could conceivably constitute a hazard. You may have a chattering passenger or a back-seat driver, or perhaps a restless child in the car.

All these factors and sometimes others as well demand that you spread your attention over a broad sphere of awareness; your awareness needs to be expanded, not concentrated. It must be intensified in a certain sense as well as expanded, also, in that you must keep at a high pitch of alertness, but it is not intensified with regard to any one object or at any one point to the exclusion of others.

Now while some things that you do demand some degree of alertness or awareness, either in a concentrated form or in an expanded or diffuse form, there are many other activities that you carry out with little or no awareness. These activities are largely the things that you do by habit.

In any habit, your awareness tends to sink to a lower level, and because of this you give little or no thought to the purpose of the activity or the exact manner in which you carry it out. It takes on a mechanical character.

In many cases this mechanical nature of a habitual activity is a good thing, for it leaves you free to devote your awareness to more important activities. It is true also that if too many of your general activities are based on habits, both of thought and of action, your whole life tends to sink into the unthinking drift; but in its sphere habit has a real function. That function is to set the consciousness or awareness free

for more important things.

When you set out to work on the problem of breaking a bad habit—a habit that gives rise to adverse consequences—you must first realise that you probably retain some of your habits, good and bad, largely because they yield some form of satisfaction; and this is true, very often, even if they also cause dissatisfaction of another sort.

Before you begin to use self-discipline on a habit, then, it may be as well to make some attempt to analyse it in order to find out whether or not it yields any satisfaction, and then to find the nature of the satisfaction it yields, a satisfaction that in some cases may not be apparent on the surface. And if you are successful in doing so, it may then be necessary to find a way to gain the same satisfaction in another way.

In this matter it is not possible to do much more than generalise. The main point is that you may find that self-discipline alone is not always adequate in attempting to break a bad habit, and in many cases it is necessary to develop an increasing mindfulness of your own mind—its hidden motives, its half-recognised greeds, hatreds, and delusions—in order to clear a field in which self-discipline can work more effectively.

In any form of mental culture it is generally better to work for an all-round improvement in the mental operations as a whole than to devote too large an effort to one isolated characteristic. There are exceptions, of course, as for

example when that characteristic is so bad that it justifies concentrated effort.

In any case, no single trait can rightly be considered on its own; it must be considered in relation to or as a part of the whole mental structure considered as a totality.

Many of your habitual activities have no special moral significance and play little part in strengthening or weakening the mental functions.

In driving a car, for example, your habitual response to situations encountered on the road—traffic signals, a dog darting across the street, and so on—have no moral significance. But sometimes, perhaps, you habitually respond to traffic jams by impatience, or you thoughtlessly become angry with pedestrians who foolishly wander into the road without looking. Impatience and anger are habitual responses which need to be dealt with, not only because they are of an adverse or retarding nature in themselves, but also simply because they are habitual.

There are other examples of unmindful or habitual responses which may need to be handled, largely because they are habitual. There is the habit of complaining about the weather, about the rising cost of living, and about what other people do or fail to do. The point is that when you complain about these things it may be that you do so as an automatic or mechanical release for your adverse emotions. In the present context, it is in the mechanical or habitual nature of these complaints that the fault lies; your

complaining may be justified, or it may not, but that's another matter of secondary importance from the present viewpoint.

You need some sort of release for these emotions of course; but habitual and unthinking releases are retarding because they come about without mindfulness, and because your mind is then in a rut.

The thing to do is to try to develop an awareness, a watchful attitude towards your own responses, and to try, whenever the situation allows it, to act in a manner directly opposite to the old mechanical way. If you want to raise your voice in anger, try to speak quietly. If you feel a tendency to turn away without speaking, try to make a courteous reply. If you feel a desire to strike out, verbally or otherwise, try to react in a kindly way.

In all such situations, the thing to do is to react in a manner directly contrary to the automatic, mechanical, or habitual response. This will help to weaken and break down the adverse mental factors involved and also make the mind keener.

Building up new habits involves the use of increased awareness or attentiveness. One habit worth cultivating in most cases is the habit of observation, and this forms the subject of the practical work for this period.

Practical Work:

Outward Observation

Mindfulness has many aspects. That is to say, there are many things towards which you may direct increased attention and many directions in which you may cultivate greater awareness. From the Buddhist viewpoint, the chief value of mindfulness lies in directing the attention inwardly and in cultivating a penetrating awareness of the physical and mental phenomena that together constitute your own "current of existence," your own self.

However, from the viewpoint of greater efficiency in the workaday routine, there is generally some scope for increased mindfulness with regard to external things as well as for inwardly-directed attention. Some of us need to cultivate a penetrating awareness not only of our own mental state but also of the things around us.

This applies more to the introvert than to the extraverted type of man or woman. If you are naturally an extravert, you will tend to have an inherent tendency to take notice of things around you and of events going on in the external world; you will have an acute power of observation together with a retentive memory for all such things.

You may then conclude that you have no need for increased outwardly-directed mindfulness. But this practise, although primarily one in which the attention is directed to things and happenings outside you, doesn't stop there; it is meant

to be linked up with self-observation as well. In other words, you can use your observational powers to take notice of your own emotional reactions to things and happenings around you as well as of the things and happenings themselves.

If, on the other hand, you tend to be a little too introverted, and if you feel that your powers of external observation need to be developed, you may feel that the cultivation of attention towards external things would help you, not only towards greater efficiency in your workaday life, but towards a better standard of general mindfulness. It is quite possible that an increased attentiveness towards your outer environment would reflect itself in a greater awareness—and thus in a greater control—of your emotional biases and faulty perceptions.

To undertake this practise, then, you make up your mind to observe the various objects in your immediate environment in greater detail and with greater care. If your powers of observation are already good, your primary objective would be to pay special attention to your own emotional reactions to the things, people, and events that affect you.

Some things will stimulate your desires and start trains of thought in your mind. Some people will irritate you and arouse resentment and other forms of aversion. And some events will bring out your self-assertive tendencies.

The three basic mental factors that most retard progress, according to Buddhist psychology, are selfish desire,

aversion, and self-assertion; and to deal with them the essential step is to become aware of them.

If your powers of observation are already well developed, you can give primary attention to your own reactions. If, on the other hand, your powers of observation are not as good as you would like them to be, you should use this practise to improve them. In that case you can make the detailed observation of external matters your primary aim in this practise.

In any case, it will help considerably if, whenever you can, you slow down your own activities in order to observe or to perceive things more carefully. For most of the time you will probably be unable to do this, but if you set out to slow down when you can, you will establish better habits of observation which will carry over into the more hurried periods.

At first, perhaps, you would do well to restrict your increased observation to one small sphere; for example, to the people you meet in the course of the day's work and other activities. At some convenient time recall several people and jot down the colours of their hair and eyes, their facial characteristics, and some details of the clothing they wear. Or if you prefer it, take the houses you pass on your way to the railway station and set out to observe them in greater detail; then, later on, see if you can describe them to yourself in detail.

It is worthwhile to take an occasional walk with the specific

objective of observing the details which you normally miss.

The essence of this practise is pure observation; it is not meant to be a form of memory training, although, of course, the memory will benefit. There are systems which employ various tricks of mental association, the rhyming and alliteration of words, and the building up of vivid and sometimes ludicrous mental images as aids in memory training; but these tricks—useful and beneficial as they are—should play no part in the present practise. You are, in this connection, interested in pure observation as an aim in itself and not as a memory aid.

Apply the self-contract method of self-discipline to the practise, and when you find you have neglected to use an opportunity for pure observation impose on yourself some small penalty.

[Top]

The Fifth Month

The Principle of Acceptance

What we know as the conscious level of the human mind is only a very small part of the mind in its entirety. General usage of the concept of two levels of the mind, distinguished as the conscious and the subconscious, suggests that the mind has two separate and well-defined compartments; but this concept is by no means an accurate one. It would be far better to compare the mind as a whole to a blackboard in a very dark room, with many words and phrases chalked over the whole surface. Because of the darkness of the room you can't see any of the words or phrases. However, if you shine the beam of an electric torch onto the centre of the blackboard, you'll be able to read the word that the centre of the beam illuminates, and you will be able also to see the words around the outside of the torch beam where the light is less bright.

The centre of the torch beam where the light is brightest can be compared with full consciousness, the chalked word that the beam fully illuminates being like the focus of consciousness. The words within the less bright area on the

outside of the lighted area are like the ideas in the fringe of consciousness, while those on the rest of the blackboard represent the multitudinous ideas in the subconscious mind.

As you move the torch beam on to different areas of the blackboard different words and phrases come momentarily into the centre of the beam, with others, less brightly lit, towards the outer edges of the beam. The rest of the blackboard remains in darkness.

In just the same way, the focus of consciousness moves and brings into full consciousness one idea after another, with generally a few associated ideas in the fringe of consciousness. At all times, the rest of the ideas remain in the subconscious mind.

If the blackboard were to be completely clear of obstructions you could shine the torch on to any and every word or phrase and bring it into the focus of the beam. But let's imagine, for the purpose of illustration, that some parts of the blackboard are concealed. A tall filing cabinet stands in front of one corner with a poster pinned over another corner, while on odd parts of the board numerous pieces of sticking plaster obscure various words and phrases. You can't illuminate the hidden words with the torch beam unless you can remove the filing cabinet and the poster as well as the pieces of sticking plaster.

In a similar way, the mind of the average person has many regions which are inaccessible to the torch beam of full consciousness. These are the regions which, over the years,

have been blocked off by pain and fear, by horror, guilt, and inferiority feelings. To clear these away and make the concealed ideas accessible to consciousness is generally a much greater task than can be accomplished by the average person during his lifetime.

However, even though you cannot discover and remove all the fear, guilt, and inferiority feelings that both in childhood and in later years have blocked off some regions of your mind, you can at least endeavour to accept yourself as you are, with your inheritance of primitive urges and your acquired hatreds, fears, and greeds.

This acceptance demands continuous mindfulness, for this is the key to self-improvement. Mindfulness in Buddhism has many forms, and that form which has a special value in this connection is called mindfulness of the mind. This is a matter of training yourself to be aware of your own emotional state at all times and to recognise it for what it is. If at a particular time the emotional state is one of annoyance and resentment, or of envy, ill will, or some other retarding mental factor, then the honest recognition of this factor, freed as far as possible from feelings of guilt and attempts at repression, is in effect the acceptance of yourself as you are.

It is necessary also to develop an awareness of your own progressive mental qualities, such as those of generosity, goodwill, and the discernment of the illusory nature of your own ego, without any element of personal pride or

smugness.

Thus the simple recognition of both the retarding and the progressive mental factors, as and when they arise in your daily contacts and activities, is seen to be the first application of the principle of acceptance.

The acceptance of yourself as you are must be balanced by the acceptance of other people as they are. As your self-knowledge increases so also your knowledge of other people increases. While people vary tremendously in their levels of self-development as well as in their reactions to circumstances, their most basic instinctive and emotional structures are very similar to your own.

* * *

They too, deep below the consciously accessible regions at their minds, have their own heritages of primitive urges, carried over from their pre-human and caveman ancestors. They too were subjected in childhood to varying degrees of parental mishandling and repressive control, and they too need some degree of deep understanding.

By way of this deep understanding of others, you learn to accept them as they are, so that, to the degree that you understand and accept them (but only to that degree) you will be likely to react to them without annoyance and resentment.

You may not be able to eliminate annoyance and resentment entirely from your dealings with others, of course, but you

can use such occasions for the recognition and acceptance of both your own and others' failings. With this acceptance must come greater harmony, both internally and externally.

* * *

So here are two spheres of life in which to practise the principle of acceptance—one's own emotional and mental structure and the emotion-laden reactions of other people. There's a third sphere in which to apply the same principle, and this is the world as a whole with its mixture of pleasure and pain.

If you were to become a prisoner you could adopt any of three attitudes towards your prison. Firstly, you could kick the walls, thump the bars, shout abuse at the guards, and reject it at every point with bitterness and resentment. The effect would be to make your imprisonment more severe and traumatic in every way, and to increase the very things you reject.

At the other extreme you could sit in passive resignation and brood in an inert manner, making no effort to find a means of escape. Your apathy would serve only to magnify your misery and resentment.

Both of these extreme attitudes would tend to paralyse your powers. However, there's a third kind of attitude you could adopt: you could accept your prison as a problem to be solved, assessing it realistically and in great detail, searching for its flaws, and remaining always alert and ready to take the first real opportunity to escape. This

attitude, ideally, should have no resentment in it, for resentment and its kindred mental states cause emotional biases, which in turn impair your judgement; and impaired judgement brings unrealistic action.

The acceptance of the world as it really is must embrace the acceptance of yourself, of all the other people in your environment, and of everything that in any way impinges on you. Positive acceptance doesn't mean inert resignation. It means acceptance of things as they are as the starting point in the long trek towards freedom.

This mental attitude of acceptance makes it easier to deal with life and effectively to resist all the difficult things in the environment, as well as all the difficult things in the mind itself.

This non-resentful acceptance of things as they are is a matter of squarely meeting all things, a matter of learning to control anxiety, to conquer resentment, and to keep self-assertion in check.

With this attitude of non-resentment and positive acceptance you learn not to tense up more than necessary against adversity. This is not passive resignation; it is the positive acceptance of every problem as the raw material out of which you can build achievement. If all your problems were miraculously taken away, you would find yourself without any raw material and thus without any possibility of achievement. This principle of non-resentful acceptance must seep through the whole of life; it cannot be

made into a specific practise or a concisely-formulated exercise. The practical work for this period, then, is only the first step. It is meant to help you to acquire an insight into the degree to which you resent the problems and difficult things in your life, and from this insight the rest will follow.

Practical Work: A Self-Questionnaire on Non-Resentful Acceptance

In answering the following questionnaire, you could probably go through the whole series of questions and give an immediate answer to each question. In many cases an immediate answer will readily come to mind, but it will not necessarily be a true one, nor will it be of real value to you.

The aim of each question is not so much to arrive at an answer as to start a train of thought, and the aim of this in turn is to give you some degree of self-understanding.

Take one question at a time, then, and think about it at odd times during the day; the resulting train of thought will be of greater value than a clear-cut snap answer to the question.

As a result, it may be that other questions and other ideas, related in some way to the original question, will come into your mind. These, too, will help in the process of self-

understanding.

To start these trains of thought, then, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do I resent my problems and the difficult things in my life?
2. Or do I accept these problems and difficult things as the raw material for achievement?
3. Do I resent being dominated or controlled by others?
4. Do I deeply envy the good fortunes of others?
5. Do I resent being ignored by others?
6. Do I accept these problems and difficult things in an inert, defeated way?
7. If so, has this brought about a half-repressed bitterness and a smouldering resentment towards them?
8. Do I tend to resent any particular religious group?
9. Or any particular racial group?
10. Have I a defensive attitude towards life or people as a whole?
11. Or an aggressive attitude?
12. Or a suspicious attitude?
13. Do I harbour any grudges or desires for revenge?
14. Do I have any strong motivations which are based on resentment?

15. Do I react to criticism with hostility or resentment?

* * *

Assuming that you are employing the self-contract method of self-discipline, look back every few days to see if you have used the questionnaire consistently and in a sufficiently penetrating manner; and, if you feel you have not done so, deprive yourself of some small pleasure.

[Top]

The Sixth Month

The Awareness of Emotion

If you want to control something—whatever it is—the more you know about it the better you will be able to control it. If you want to drive a car, you can manage with a minimum of knowledge of its workings while conditions are good; but when it breaks down, miles from help, the greater your knowledge of its mechanism the greater will be your chance of getting it on the move again.

It is the same with your own emotional problems. You can go only a small distance in life without emotional problems, and while you need no special understanding of them when the going is smooth you do need all the self-knowledge possible when you enter a rough phase.

Can you imagine a motor mechanic who has no clear understanding of what goes on under the bonnet of a car? Yet many of us have no clear understanding of what goes on under our own bonnets.

The greater the self-knowledge you possess the better, and this is true both of knowledge gained by your own self-

observation and of knowledge gained by book-learning. One supplements the other, and this applies particularly to the knowledge of emotion. Let us therefore consider emotion at the theoretical level.

Emotions are accompanied by certain bodily changes, or perhaps we should say that emotions consist of the awareness of the bodily changes that take place under certain conditions.

In order to illustrate this point, let us take the condition of fear. When you become frightened it begins with some frightening idea in your mind. This frightening idea is the cause of your emotion of fear, and is accompanied by a nervous current in certain parts of your brain.

From the brain, this nervous current travels to your adrenal glands, and this causes these glands to discharge into your blood stream a substance known as adrenalin. Your blood stream conveys this adrenalin to various organs of your body.

The adrenalin has a definite effect on many of these organs; for example, when it reaches your liver it causes it to discharge into your blood stream an extra supply of sugar, this sugar giving to every muscle that it reaches an additional energy supply.

As further results of the adrenalin in your blood, your heart beats more rapidly, your eyes open wider, and your blood itself clots more readily should you be wounded.

You can see that all these bodily changes would have a very definite value during actual physical combat or any rapid muscular activity; these are the extra supply of fuel to your muscles, for example, and the quicker heart-beat and circulation which replenish this fuel supply and remove the ash from your cells; these are all valuable to you if you are fleeing or fighting, running or climbing.

There are some side-effects, too. For example, your hair tends to stand on end. This does not help you, of course, but it does help some of your sub-human relations when it happens to them. It helps a cat to appear bigger and more formidable and thus more frightening to an enemy, and it helps a porcupine because its quills are an actual defensive weapon.

When your hair stands on end, then, you are automatically responding in the same way as did some of your prehuman-relations. But in you it is an obsolete mechanism.

The bodily changes are of no real use unless the need for action arises; but that is not the whole story. Man of the civilised world does not generally solve his problems in the same way as did his cave-dwelling ancestors or his primitive brothers, because his problems and his outside conditions are different. Nevertheless his involuntary reactions are much the same.

In most cases when a man becomes frightened, fighting or fleeing will not solve the problem, as there is often no tangible aggressor to fight and no place to which to flee. Yet

the bodily changes occur just the same.

Your bodily changes during fear, therefore, are often inappropriate; not only so, they are also frequently an embarrassment because too much fuel is released into your blood-stream without any purpose to fulfil. In this way you may have various physical and nervous disorders as a result of repeated emotional disorders, disorders arising not only from fear but also from anxiety, jealousy, resentment, anger, and inferiority feelings.

But the story is not yet complete. During an emotional disturbance, in order to allow full activity to various muscles—those of the legs for running, the arms for fighting, and so on—the arteries that serve the digestive system are contracted so that they receive a diminished blood supply. To divert their fuel to the other muscles, the muscles of the digestive system are deprived of it and in consequence the digestive activities are held up for the time.

Such disturbances may last for hours, and you can see how easy it is for digestive troubles to arise as a result of fear, anxiety, jealousy, resentment, anger, and inferiority feelings.

It has been shown by experiment that adverse emotions generate poisons within the bodily system, and that under extreme conditions some of the brain cells may be temporarily or permanently injured by intense emotion.

So from all this you can see that some sort of emotional discipline is desirable. Of what possible use are the bodily changes of fear or anger when a man insults you over the

telephone? Certainly they give you extra strength to throw the telephone out of the window, but this solves no problems. If a man falls in love with a screen actress his heart will beat more rapidly to enable him to begin a primitive love-chase; but in the circumstances of modern civilisation where would this chase end—or begin?

* * *

Now there are three aspects to the matter of disciplining the emotions. The first aspect of emotional discipline is the development of a habit of self-observation with regard to your own emotional conditions. In Buddhist terminology, this is called the detailed observation of the mental state. The second aspect involves the control of emotional manifestations as these arise. The third aspect is a matter of developing a new set of values of such a kind that many of the circumstances that previously called out the responses of fear, anger, self-assertion, and so on, then fail to do so, or at least do so to a reduced extent.

Little need he said about the need for controlling the powerful emotions that lead to both external discord and internal conflict; their effects are in most cases distressingly obvious. Racial hatreds, religious prejudices, and political biases—these lie at the root of many quarrels between individuals and between nations. Ambivalent feelings of love and hate towards others within the family, as well as irrational fears and guilt complexes, give rise to neuroses and other mental aberrations.

To wait until an emotional problem reaches major proportions before dealing with it is like waiting until a trickle becomes a flood. The Buddhist method is to keep constant watch—to apply constant mindfulness—while an adverse emotion exists as a trickle, and to deal with it at this stage; for when it reaches the proportions of a flood much of the damage inwardly and outwardly is already done.

To try to deal with major emotional problems by any sort of repressive emotional control either drives the real causes into other channels or else intensifies the outer effects, so that emotional control requires something better than any possible form of surface treatment can offer.

Emotional control must begin with what in Buddhism is called the detailed observation of the mental state. This is a matter of continual self-observation with a view to detecting the presence of any emotion which might retard the mind's progress towards enlightenment.

The recognition of such retarding emotions in their mildest and most unobtrusive forms is regarded in Buddhist practise as highly important, for it is necessary to see them for what they are before they reach greater proportion. Recognition is the first essential to control.

In order to control your emotions you must know what you are controlling, and this knowledge (apart from its theoretical aspect) is the work of mindfulness. Without it attempts at control by will-power alone might degenerate into harmful repression.

Repression is a matter of pressing unwelcome mental states below the level at which they are accessible to consciousness. The work of mindfulness, on the other hand, is the work of bringing the full light of sharpened awareness to bear on all mental states, unwelcome and otherwise, and this is the very opposite of repression.

There are, of course, occasions in your everyday life when you must exercise a great deal of effort of will to prevent an emotional outburst. You must bottle up your emotions even though you know that this bottling-up is building up harmful tension, tension of mind and body.

At other times you feel that it is absolutely imperative to give vent to your adverse emotions, hateful and petty and spiteful as you know them to be. You feel you must have your emotional splurge whatever the consequences.

Which is right and which is wrong? Right and wrong are conventional words which sometimes obscure the real point. The real question is, which does the less harm in the long run? You must either keep control at all costs—and this, according to some standards, is the right thing to do—or you must let go and give your wrong emotions an outlet.

The answer, in part at least, is that whatever you do, you must do it as mindfully as possible in the circumstances. If you must let go and have your emotional splurge, if you must give way to your annoyance, self-pity, envy, or whatever it is, you should be as fully aware of it as you can and realise its nature. In this way you will keep some

control over it; but once you seek to justify yourself or deceive yourself as to what you are doing you begin to lose this control.

You must, of course, consider its effects on others, and from this viewpoint an emotional outburst is often quite wrong. From one viewpoint—from the viewpoint of your own development—it is better to do wrong mindfully than to do right mindlessly; it is better to be fully aware of what you are doing and why you are doing it—however conventionally wrong it is—than to do the conventionally right thing without knowing why.

When your emotions are too strong and you give way to an emotional outburst, this outburst can be considered a failure; but because you are an ordinary human being and not a superhuman these failures will occur from time to time. If you train yourself in mindfulness—especially in the detailed observation of the mental state—such failures will occur less and less frequently. The important thing is that progress is taking place.

Practical Work: The Control of Anxiety

To become tense in circumstances of stress is easy; to remain calm and free from agitation is difficult. Being difficult, it

requires self-training, self-training not only at the level of muscular relaxation but also at the mental level. Methods of muscular relaxation are of great value in bringing about a generally relaxed condition of both mind and body, for mind and body interact; but muscular relaxation needs to be supplemented by mental relaxation.

Let us consider, therefore, how best you can approach the problem of tension at the mental level. To do this, of course, you must go further back than the tension itself; you must go back to the tension-causing factors in the mind; and these can he defined in broad terms as anxiety, resentment, and self-assertion.

These three factors arise from what in Buddhism are called the three roots of mental evil—selfish desire, aversion, and delusion. From selfish desire arises anxiety; from aversion arises resentment; and from delusion arises self-assertion. Of these three tension-causing factors—anxiety, resentment, and self-assertion—let us take just one as the basis for an exercise in mindfulness.

Therefore, during a period of a month or more, take in hand the problem of anxiety. Make a contract with yourself to the effect that after each time you allow yourself to become unduly anxious about anything at all you will apply some small self-imposed penalty on yourself.

Just what penalty you use is for you to decide, but it should be an easy one, one that you can impose on yourself without tending to throw it aside. If you find it too irksome you will

need to break it down a little; on the other hand if it becomes too easy and ineffective you will need to stiffen it up to some extent.

You must recognise that anxiety is related to desires of various kinds (selfish and otherwise), to attachment, and to possessiveness. In tackling the problem of anxiety, then, you are working on these other factors as well to some extent.
[Top]

The Seventh Month

The Mechanisms of Self-Deceit

There exists within the mind of every normal person a heritage of primitive urges, brought over from mankind's early human and pre-human ancestors in their battle for survival. To recognise that these primitive urges exist in you is one of the first steps you must make in your progress along the path of self-understanding; to refuse to recognise them, to refuse to see them as parts of your mental make-up, is to build up a wall of self-deceit within your own mind.

In your early life, because other people disapproved of these primitive urges, you learnt to disguise them and in some cases to be ashamed of them. At first you learnt to refuse to admit them to other people, while at a later stage you refused—at least, you tried to refuse—to admit them to yourself.

One reason for this refusal was that you wanted to think highly of yourself, to keep your sense of ego intact at all costs. It is, incidentally, this sense of ego which is the focal

point of self-deceit, and it is also the same sense of ego which is the focus on which the Buddha-doctrine centres its attack.

* * *

As to the mechanisms which the mind uses in its efforts to deceive itself, it will be helpful if we consider them in terms of brain structure and function.

In a certain sense you may regard the brain as a highly complicated system of pathways or circuits along which the nervous energy travels. Each such pathway is called a neurogram. When the nervous energy travels along one particular pathway or neurogram, a corresponding idea tends to arise in consciousness, and when the nervous energy moves into another pathway or neurogram the first idea fades and another one arises in consciousness.

Now if one of these nervous pathways becomes impaired or damaged in some way it will be able to carry the nervous energy only with difficulty, if at all. You can compare this situation with a road which develops potholes, so that a car travelling along it does so in a series of bumps and lurches. The driver whenever possible avoids this bumpy, difficult, and painful road.

This simile will help you to understand the "avoidant mechanisms" of the mind, for in a similar manner the nervous energy will avoid travelling along or through a neurogram which has been made difficult and painful.

It needs no technical jargon or psychological training to say that we all tend to avoid the painful and unpleasant. That, of course, is what defines the painful and unpleasant; we tend to avoid it.

Let us consider an example. A child undergoes a frightening experience; it does not matter much what sort of experience, but he is very frightened by it. When it has been over for some time he tries not to think about it, because when he thinks about it he becomes afraid again. This is reasonable and easy to understand, and it all takes place at a conscious level. Later, it becomes subconscious.

But this does not mean that the child immediately blots out all memory of the frightening experience; the process as a rule is a gradual one, and the child's refusal to think about it is at first ineffective. Later, however, it gradually becomes successful, and at the same time it becomes habitual. When an activity, mental or bodily, becomes habitual, it also becomes less conscious.

Thus the mechanism of avoidance, at first conscious, gradually sinks to the subconscious level.

There are other types of experience besides fear that set in motion the mechanism of avoidance; those of horror, nausea, and physical pain, for example. The feeling of inferiority is another of these, and so are the feelings of guilt and unworthiness. No one likes to feel inferior, guilty, or unworthy, and the mind at both conscious and subconscious levels tends to avoid these feelings.

But back to the car driver; having found the road full of potholes, difficult, and even painful, he avoids it; but he nevertheless wishes to reach his destination somehow, and he does not abandon his journey just because the road is in poor condition. He finds an alternative road, even if it means a lengthy detour and a longer route.

In the same way the nervous energy refuses to cease its activity because one neurogram is pain-blocked, and it finds another neurogram which offers it a pleasant pathway. When this happens in the brain there arises in the mind a substitute-idea, for while the mind refuses to allow the pain-blocked idea to arise in consciousness it diverts its energy to a more acceptable idea. This is the mechanism of "divertence." Because of the mechanism of divertence, there are times when you experience emotion but deceive yourself as to its true object. For some reason or other you do not wish to attach that particular emotion to that particular object.

For example, a child both loves and hates his mother. It must be realised that practically every child has ambivalent emotions towards his parents. In fact, he has ambivalent attitudes towards many significant things in his life, which means that he both loves and hates them. He loves his parents at one time because they look after him and he hates them at another when they scold and punish him; but both opposites exist potentially in his mental structure all the time.

But while his expressions of love are well received by his parents, his expressions of hate bring him disapproval, scolding, and spankings, and perhaps lectures on the wickedness of not loving one's parents.

In the case of the sensitive child all this disapproval and lecturing produce a sense of guilt and unworthiness, and when—later on—he becomes aware of his hate he tries to suppress it. But, without any real understanding of the way his mind functions, his attempts to control his instinctive upsurges lead only to their repression.

But any mental factor which is repressed is not thereby destroyed, and the repressed emotion of hate must find its outlet. As the child's hate cannot attach itself to his mother it must attach itself to something else, something less likely to arouse the disapproval of his elders. This substitute-object may be his school teacher, for example.

Thus the disapproved emotion is displaced from its true object, his mother, to a substitute object, the teacher.

You can see, easily enough, that the avoidant mechanism and the divertant mechanism work hand in hand. The nervous energy avoids travelling along a brain pathway or neurogram that arouses ideas and emotions of guilt, inferiority, unworthiness, and pain, and it is diverted into neurograms that avoid these unpleasant feelings. And if these neurograms arouse ideas of self-righteousness, superiority, or self-importance, so much the better; or at least so it seems in a superficial sense.

* * *

Now just as pain and unpleasant emotions can damage a neurogram, so pleasure, physical or emotional, can smooth and improve another neurogram and thus facilitate the passage of the nervous energy through it.

To revert once again to our car driver, he will avoid a narrow road whose surface is full of potholes, and he will divert his course to a road which is in good condition. But if there is yet a third road which has been broadened and well-surfaced, and which gives beautiful views and interesting vistas throughout its whole length, then he will travel on this road whenever he can. And he will do this not always because it leads to any special destination but for the sheer pleasure of travelling along that road, with its views and vistas. He may even do this when he should be travelling to his work or attending to other responsibilities.

In the same way the mental energy will flow along a neurogram that yields pleasure, even though there is no other purpose to it than the pleasure it yields, and even though it solves no other problem or brings about no particular decision. This describes the mechanism of "fixation."

As an example, if a child is spoilt, if his mother fusses over his comforts and pleasures, if she over-protects him and gives him excessive praise, all at the expense of his character-development, then his mental energy will become fixated on the mental image of his mother.

* * *

So here you have three basic mental mechanisms—avoidance, caused by a pain-blocked neurogram; divertence, dependent on an alternative neurogram; and fixation, arising from an over-facilitated neurogram.

If you accept the idea that—in common with humanity at large—your mind employs various modes of self-deceit, you can see that these mechanisms are at the root of much of this self-deceit, and it is the pain-blocked neurograms that account for the very natural resistance that sometimes comes to the surface when you are required, in the process of self-understanding, to face the less savoury aspects of your own mind.

This resistance arises when someone questions the rightness or value of some self-deceit you have been treasuring. Such a resistance comes to the surface as annoyance, fear, or maybe some kind of irrational mental attitude. Its function—if you can call it a function—is to keep the self-deceit intact.

Until you can overcome this resistance and face all your self-deceits you are helpless against them; they dominate your thinking, and this is one of the greatest difficulties in the task of self-understanding.

Practical Work:

The Control of Irritability and Resentment

Few of us have entirely overcome the tendency to speak or respond irritably in difficult circumstances, nor are many of us free from a tendency to harbour some degree of resentment. This resentment generally concerns petty injustices and hurts, inflicted—in reality or sometimes in imagination—by others.

For present purposes we shall assume that you are amongst the majority in this respect. For a month or longer, then, take in hand your own tendencies towards irritability and resentment, however slight they happen to be, and use them as the basis for an exercise in mindfulness.

In the ordinary but unnatural tempo of life it is difficult to maintain a condition of tranquillity in all circumstances, for there are often too many petty annoyances in the daily routine and in consequence the mind is too often aroused to a state of anger. Now this anger does not have to take the form of rage or fury to be anger; very often you are merely mildly angry, and you fail to realise just how often in the ordinary course of the day your anger is aroused in a mild way.

This practise, then, is a matter of watching yourself critically and dispassionately, with a view to realising just how often and under what conditions your anger is slightly aroused.

In this practise you are not interested in the major displays of anger that sometimes occur, for you are fully aware of them. It is the occasional small annoyances, the petty irritations, that should be the object of increased awareness in the daily routine, for, once the minor forms of anger become well-controlled as a matter of habit, the major displays of anger are easier to control.

It is essential at this point to note that control does not mean repression, for the repression of an emotion-laden thought means that it is pressed down below the level at which it is accessible to consciousness. Such a process is the very opposite of the process of mindfulness, which in one sense is the process of extending the range of consciousness.

If you can develop the habit of dispassionate observation with respect to your mental state at all times, you can progressively increase your control over your reactions to the outside world and gradually find a greater degree of inward balance and tranquillity.

In acquiring a more detailed awareness of the functions and contents of your own mind, an essential part of the process is the work of making the acquaintance of its more unsavoury elements, the retarding factors of the mind. If you become more familiar with your hidden hatreds, fears, and jealousies, you then know better how to deal with them.

Make a contract with yourself, a pact-resolution, to the effect that you will impose on yourself some small penalty soon after any occasion on which you respond irritably or

harbour resentful thoughts.
[Top]

The Eighth Month

The Buddhist Doctrine of Egolessness

Self-assertion, the assertion of one's own rights and privileges, of one's importance, and of one's individual and distinctive existence; this is one of the major modes of instinctive response to many of the circumstances of life. It is one of the prime elements in the search for personal gratification.

It is a never-ending search, this search for personal gratification; for each satisfaction that is achieved is only a temporary one, and sooner or later the search must be resumed. To seek happiness by way of self-assertion, according to the teachings of Buddhism, is the surest way to perpetuate the sorrows and unsatisfactory factors in personal life, for enduring happiness can be found only by breaking free from the false belief in a self separate from life as a whole.

The most distinctive feature of Buddhism is the teaching that the innermost core of individual existence is not a fixed unchanging ego or self but a momentary and ever-changing

current of forces. This, if followed through, leads to a policy of non-assertion instead of self-assertion; and therefore non-assertion must be cultivated in the quest for ultimate happiness.

One of the basic characteristics of the world around us is the complete absence of permanence. Some things last a long while, it's true, and seem to change very little over the years; but nothing is permanent in any true sense.

You will find that the fact of impermanence is easy to acknowledge in a superficial way; but you will also find that it's very difficult to accept it with all its implications.

We live in a world of impermanence, yet at the same time we try to stave off this impermanence by making our desired things last as long as we can. Growing old, we try to keep up some semblance of youth. While recognising the fact of impermanence, we find it unpalatable and therefore refuse to accept it. Up to a point, we succeed in rejecting it; and to this extent we delude ourselves.

We know, of course, that we must accept some suffering, some pain and sorrow, mixed in with our happiness in this round of birth and death; but knowing of no other existence, we have no option but to keep on seeking for happiness by gratifying our desires. We think that this is the only way in which we can gain happiness; and here again we delude ourselves.

In our efforts to stave off the impermanence always closing in around us, and in our struggle for happiness in a

universe of mixed pleasure and pain, we are impelled, much of the time, to assert ourselves and to act from self-interest, not knowing that, in the ultimate, self-assertion is the arch-enemy of happiness. Here, once again, we delude ourselves.

So we are deluding ourselves in three main ways. In seeking for permanence in a world essentially impermanent, we are reducing rather than increasing our happiness. In looking for happiness within the round of birth and death we are looking in the wrong direction. And in asserting ourselves we are doing the very thing that makes complete happiness impossible.

So the Buddha-doctrine states, in effect, that we must understand and fully accept three salient characteristics of existence, namely:

1. the fact that everything in the relative universe is impermanent;
2. the fact that everything in the relative universe is in a constant state of agitation, a state which in conscious, living beings may become suffering; and
3. the fact that no being possesses a fixed, unchanging, eternal self, soul, or ego.

You will find that these three characteristics of the relative universe—impermanence, suffering, and egolessness—are of fundamental importance in Buddhism.

The first of them, the characteristic of impermanence, is

emphasised again and again, as our attachment to the impermanent keeps us imprisoned within the wheel of birth and death.

The second characteristic, suffering, is the starting point in Buddhism, for the Buddha-way is concerned primarily with suffering and the cure of suffering. In terms of fundamentals, every particle of the universe is in a state of agitation, and in conscious living beings the higher degrees of this agitation become different degrees of suffering. Some of the lower degrees of this agitation are known as pleasure, and the differences between pleasure and suffering lies in the intensity of the agitation.

The third characteristic, egolessness, is the focal point of the whole of the Buddha-doctrine, the central element in the whole teaching. You can't understand the Buddha-doctrine unless you understand the meaning of egolessness from the beginning. It doesn't matter a great deal if you miss the technicalities of the law of action and reaction, or the subtleties of Buddhist metaphysics; but it does matter if you fail to grasp the meaning of egolessness. Everything is focused on this point, and without an understanding of it many things in Buddhism may fail to make sense.

In the practise of the Buddha-way the emphasis on the doctrine of egolessness is even more important and vital. If you want to practise Buddhism, as distinct from making it a parlour-game like chess, you must focus your attention on the problem of subduing your ego-concept and of realising

its falsity.

Following the outer forms of morality is just the first stage of the work. The traditional customs of Buddhism as carried out in the East are conventionally right in their own place, but those customs imported into the West may merely provide side-interests which weaken the attack on the self-concept. Talking about Buddhism until the jaws ache may enlighten others, but too often it mainly functions as a means of self-assertion. None of these things—superficial morality, the observance of customs, and talking about Buddhism—has any ultimate value unless it leads up to the effort to eradicate the self-delusion.

The reason for the supreme importance given to the teaching of egolessness is that the belief in a separate permanent self is the salient point in that basic ignorance which, in Buddhism, is regarded as the source of all suffering; for when the delusion of selfhood is finally broken down the basic ignorance also is destroyed.

This matter of egolessness is really a particular case of Impermanence; for it means that a being does not possess a permanent or unchanging soul at the centre of his existence, but consists of an impermanent and ever-changing life-current, which is never the same for two consecutive moments. There is, according to this, no hard core at the centre of a being's existence, no eternal soul, no fixed or unalterable ego. In this sense, the self doesn't exist.

However, to say that the self doesn't exist, flatly and boldly

like that, doesn't give a true picture. It is much better to say that the self doesn't exist in the way in which we think it exists. The self doesn't exist as an unchanging entity, but it does exist as a fluid or fluctuating life-current, an ever-changing stream of existence.

A living being has been described, according to the Buddhist concept of things, as "a flame-like process which burns by virtue of a force peculiar to itself." Note particularly the term "a flame-like process". This expresses the idea very concisely, for you will find that, over and over again, the Buddha-doctrine insists on the dynamic nature of existence, with no static entity to be found anywhere.

This flame-like process (which is the nearest approach to a self or soul you will ever find in Buddhism) is the life-current. In the human being it manifests in a five-fold way. First, it builds around itself a material body. Secondly, by way of this material body it experiences existence in terms of pleasurable feelings, neutral feelings, and unpleasurable feelings. Thirdly, it experiences existence in terms of perceptions. Fourthly, it reacts to these experiences by way of volitional tendencies, or determinants, whereby it sorts out the feelings and perceptions and determines lines of activity. And fifthly, there is the basic cognitive faculty functioning as consciousness and also operating on that subconscious level.

In other words, the flame-like process we call the life-current consists of a multitude of components, some

material and some mental; these components, for the purpose of analysing the individual human being, are classified into five groups. These five component-groups, which we have just touched on briefly, can be described more fully in the following way.

Component-group 1—the body. You as an individual human being consist of a mind and a body; and your body, broadly speaking, can be spoken of as the group of material components that help to make up your life-current, your so-called self.

Component-group 2—the feelings. You are aware of the world around you by way of your five physical senses and also by way of ideas that you build up out of your sense-impressions. In thus becoming aware of a stimulus—that is, either of a sense-object or of an idea—you experience either a pleasant awareness of it, unpleasant awareness of it, or a neutral awareness of it with neither pleasure nor displeasure. This quality of awareness is called feeling, and all pleasant, neutral, and unpleasant feelings are included in this second group of components.

Component-group 3—the perceptions. In Buddhist psychology there are six different kinds of perception. These are (1) vision, (2) hearing, (3) smell, (4) taste, (5) body-sense-perception (or, to use the neurological term, somaesthetic perception, including the perceptions of temperature and contact), and (6) mental perception. The word translated as perception embraces also awareness and the faculty that

recognises, identifies, and compares the differences and similarities between stimuli.

Component-group 4—the determinants. The previous two groups of components (the feelings and the perceptions) consist of somewhat passive mental factors. That is to say, the feelings and the perceptions are forms of awareness that occur in relation to the reception of incoming stimuli. In contrast, the fourth group comprises components of an active or dynamic nature. These centre around the volition or will, and determine the person's activities; and for this reason we can call them the determinants.

There are fifty of these determinants as usually listed, and I do not intend to bore you by discussing the whole lot of them. However, I will mention a few.

The first is contact-awareness, the initial impingement or meeting of a sense-object or a mind-object with a sense-organ and consciousness.

The next to be mentioned is the volition or will. This dominates all the other determinants and to some extent controls their activities, thus influencing the tendencies of thought, speech, and bodily action.

Then there is one-pointedness, whereby the mind is centred on one sense-object or idea at a time. Mental vitality is next, and is roughly parallel though not identical with the nervous energy. The next is attention, the mental faculty which brings a sense-object or idea into the focus of consciousness.

These five that I have just mentioned are present in all forms of consciousness, together with feeling and perception, which make, in all seven universal mental factors.

Others in the group of determinants are application (the initial application of consciousness when a new impression enters the mind); discursiveness, which is the faculty of searching within the mind for the identification and associations of a newly-entered impression; mental effort; interest; intention; and decisiveness, or the faculty of deciding between two courses of action.

None of the determinants so far mentioned has either a moral or an immoral character. The remaining members of this component-group, however, do have such a relationship, and they are classified into twenty-five morally-skilful determinants and fourteen morally-unskilful determinants.

Included in the morally-skilful determinants are generosity, goodwill, and non-delusion; while the morally-unskilful impulses include greed, ill will, delusion, dogmatism, envy, and anxiety. Another, generally called conceit, is practically the same as the Western concept of the inferiority complex.

You will no doubt see that some of the determinants can be roughly equated with the instincts of Western psychology, the desires and emotions that arise with the operation of these instincts, and the thought-habits that are built up by the frequent repetition of thoughts.

Component-group 5—the basic cognitive faculty. In Buddhist psychology the mind—both in the form of full consciousness and in its subconscious functions—is a form of energy, in the same sense in which light and electricity are forms of energy; and, without the presence of this special form of energy, the other mental component-groups could not arise.

The basic cognitive faculty operates in a sixfold way through the various sense-organs. First, it operates as visual consciousness when it functions by way of the eye and the total visual sense; secondly, as auditory consciousness through the ear and the auditory sense; thirdly, as olfactory consciousness by way of the sense of smell; fourthly, as gustatory consciousness by way of the taste-buds of the tongue and elsewhere; fifthly, as body consciousness through innumerable sensory end-organs of contact, temperature, and other somaesthetic senses; and sixthly, as mind-consciousness—the perception of ideas—through the organs of mind.

All mental states are regarded as having a degree of consciousness, even those states which appear to be unconscious; but in so-called unconscious and subconscious states the consciousness is too low in intensity to register in the memory, and therefore cannot afterwards be recollected.

Now this analysis of the individual being into five groups of components may appear to you to be dry and somewhat overburdened with technicalities, and perhaps rather

pointless. But it has a point, and a point that bears directly on the doctrine of egolessness. The point is that each of the component-groups is impermanent, fluctuating, and ever-changing; and in the multitudinous components of individual existence nothing whatever of a fixed or permanent nature can be found.

The first component-group, the body, is changing all of the time, slowly or quickly, growing larger or smaller, wearing out, or repairing itself, getting warmer or cooler, or changing in some way.

The four mental component-groups are equally transient, or more so. The feelings arise and fall away from minute to minute, and the perceptions behave in a similar manner; while the determinants, conditioned by or dependent on the feelings and the perceptions, change accordingly. The basic cognitive faculty, functioning as consciousness, continually changing from instant to instant, is just as impermanent as all the rest.

You can see, then, that the purpose of this analysis of individual existence is to show that nowhere is there any possibility of a permanent self, soul, or ego. A wave arises on the ocean of becoming, and you are that wave; another wave arises nearby, and I am that wave; while all around us are other waves, other beings, people, ants, elephants, cats, and dogs.

In time, each wave sinks back into the ocean of becoming; but the forces that comprise it cause a new wave to arise

somewhere else. The new wave is not identical with the old one, but it is not altogether different; there is continuity, but there is no fixed unchanging identity. In the same way, when a being dies, certain of the forces of which the life-current consists cause a new being to come into existence. The new being is not identical with the old one, but the new being is not altogether different from the old one; there is continuity, but no fixed entity.

Since the focal point in Buddhism is the realisation that the self is a delusion, the final goal is naturally the annihilation of the delusion. This final goal is the Unconditioned, the ultimate bliss which lies beyond the ordinary happiness of personal life. In a sense it is annihilation, but only the annihilation of the unreal. The Unconditioned is the state beyond words and beyond thought that supervenes when the delusion of selfhood is destroyed; for it is the world of impermanence and suffering that is found to be unreal when measured in ultimate terms.

Now what is the significance of egolessness as far as your daily life is concerned? Its significance is that the self you so lovingly nurture, the ego you love to expand and hate to withdraw, is a delusion and the ultimate cause of your suffering. Every act you carry out on behalf of the self-delusion is just so much energy tipped down the drain. Once you realise this fact of egolessness, once you learn to become constantly aware of it and to discipline your behaviour accordingly, it must of necessity modify your life-style and enable you to stand up to the rebuffs, neglects,

and denials that the world heaps on you from time to time.

The doctrine of egolessness can be concisely summed up in this way:

> "You who are slaves of the self, who toil from morning until night in the service of self, who live in constant fear of birth, old age, sickness, and death, receive the good news that your cruel master does not exist."

The Inferiority Complex

You may find it interesting to consider the Western concept of the inferiority complex in the light of the Buddhist doctrine of egolessness. You will recall that, in discussing those components of personal existence that we referred to as the determinants—the active or dynamic mental factors—we mentioned one which is generally called conceit. This determinant, according to the Buddha-doctrine, is of three kinds.

First, there is the conceit which makes one think "I am inferior to another;" then a second form of conceit gives rise to the idea "I am equal to the other person;" and thirdly there is the kind which causes one to think "I am superior to the other."

From this, it is apparent that conceit in this sense means a factor of the mind which not merely makes one feel superior

to another (the meaning which is ordinarily attached to the word) but which prompts one to be concerned with one's own inferiority, equality, or superiority by comparison with another person.

You can see, then, that the meaning of conceit is closely paralleled by the Western idea of the inferiority complex, which arises from one's own self-centred and pathological concern with one's inferiority, equality, and superiority as compared with others.

Let's consider this matter of the inferiority complex as seen from the standpoint of Western thought.

We all know how it feels to be left out of a conversation. We all know what it feels like when others in a group are talking about things of which we know nothing, and, what is worse, talking about them almost as if we were not there at all. No one—neither you nor I nor any other normal person—likes to be ignored.

To be ignored when we want to be recognised means to feel inferior.

We all know, too, what it feels like to be painfully self-conscious. You, no doubt, can recall a situation in which you were expected to say something or to do something when attention was focused on you. You halted and you faltered without quite knowing what to say or what to do.

To be given too much attention when you feel unequal to the occasion, then, means to feel inferior.

This means, then, that there are situations in which you welcome attention, because you know that you can deal adequately with the matter in hand. You then feel perhaps a little superior. And there are times when you prefer not to be brought into focus but to remain on the outskirts of things, so to speak.

Sometimes attention shows up your inadequacies and you resent it because it gives you a sense of inferiority; at other times attention shows up your good points, so that you welcome it; it makes you feel superior and important.

Your feelings of superiority and inferiority depend largely on whether or not others applaud you, or at least approve of what you say and do.

Throughout the course of your life, no doubt, you have had experiences in which you have felt inferior, and all these experiences have been built up into a complicated mental structure that is generally known as the inferiority complex.

All of us, as normal people, have some sort of inferiority complex. Your own may be a powerful one or it may be only a mild one; it may be so strong that it dominates you, or you may have learnt to understand and control it; but unless you happen to be superhuman you must have an inferiority complex of some kind. It is a piece of standard equipment in the human mind and it has had its own special evolutionary value in the past.

You seldom hear the superiority complex mentioned. Why? The fact is that the superiority complex—apparently the

direct opposite—is the same as the inferiority complex. To want to feel superior is largely the same as the dislike of feeling inferior, and the mental mechanism of the one is the same as the mental mechanism of the other.

Let us consider the meaning of the term, the inferiority complex. Apart from its psychological implications, a complex is a number of things all held together in some way so that they all function as one unit. In this sense you could call a sewing machine a complex, because it consists of a number of parts all held together so that they function as one unit; you could not, of course, call these same parts a complex if they were all piled in a heap.

In its psychological meaning you can take a complex to mean a number of ideas all held together so that they all function as one unit.

One such complex may be related to the aggressive instinct and arouse the feeling of anger. Another complex—or any idea that forms part of it—may set to work the instinct of escape and thus generate some form of fear; such a complex is called a phobia.

Yet another complex may stimulate the instinct of self-assertion and bring with it a feeling of superiority and self-importance, or, if it is thwarted, a feeling of inferiority.

The particular instinct to which a complex is related—aggression, escape, or self-assertion, for example—is the binding and co-ordinating element in the complex.

Now when you assert yourself in some way and are thwarted, or when you attempt to display your superiority and fail, you naturally feel inferior, and every such defeat you suffer leaves its vestige in your memory-store. The sum total of all the vestiges of these thwarted attempts at self-assertion constitutes your inferiority complex. The inferiority complex is not the same as the inferiority feeling, for this is the feeling that arises when the complex is stimulated and then thwarted.

On the other hand, when your inferiority complex is stimulated into activity and this activity is successful, you have a feeling of superiority.

Why should the inferiority complex be as important as it is? In the evolution of man from his prehuman ancestors, we can see that the individual with the strongest instincts of aggression and self-assertion would be the most likely to survive under difficulties. In a fight, the one who is less aggressive is likely to perish. In a scramble for food, those lacking in self-assertion are likely to go hungry, to weaken, and to die.

Aggression and self-assertion are closely related instincts. The main function of aggression is to defeat an enemy or a rival, while that of self-assertion (in part) is to intimidate the enemy or the rival. Self-assertion also has another aspect, for we see it at work in the form of self-display in courtship.

You can see, then, that self-assertion has a survival value not only in the sphere of individual survival, but also in the

sphere of race-survival.

Because your self-assertive instinct is so important, then, your inferiority complex also is important; and because of this, in turn, it has deep-reaching effects on your life as a whole.

The Practise of Non-Assertion

If you find your inferiority complex has adverse effects on your life, and if you decide to deal with it by some form of mental culture, there is an ancient Buddhist technique which has a direct application to this matter.

A major working principle in Buddhist psychology is to strive always to see things as they really are, to work always for clear discernment as opposed to self-deceit or delusion. The technique used for this clear discernment we know as right mindfulness, and one aspect of right mindfulness is called the detailed awareness of the mental state.

The detailed awareness of the mental state is designed to give increased self-understanding, with specific regard to the emotional quality of various mental states.

This does not mean a theoretical knowledge of what goes on in people's minds in general. Although this theoretical knowledge is sometimes very helpful; it means a detailed and direct awareness of what goes on in your own mind.

It is a sharpened awareness of the emotional quality of each mental state as and when it arises, and also to a certain extent in retrospect. It is a form of self-observation designed to break down self-deceit and to keep the stream of consciousness free from delusion.

The technique consists of the formation of a new habit, the habit of bare attention. Note this term, bare attention; it means attention which is stripped bare of all emotional overtones and undercurrents, attention free from bias, free from prejudice, and free from self-deceit.

It is only by bare attention that you can see things as they really are, for emotion clouds and colours your perceptions.

To form this new habit is not easy. Your mind, as you know, likes to run in its old deep ruts, and it needs persistent self-observation and self-honesty to break out of these ruts.

There is no easy way and there is no quick way to form the habit of bare attention, but there is a valuable guide in relation to the matter of the inferiority complex. It is this: every time you feel self-important or superior, you should try to realise that it's merely a primitive instinct dominating your intellect. When your intellect can dominate your primitive instincts, you will be well on the way—not to a better feeling of superiority—but to true superiority.

As you learn to apply the detailed awareness of the mental state, you will see the part that the self-assertion instinct plays in your own life. You will see that while your inherent tendency to assert yourself in primitive circumstances had a

survival value, under the conditions of modern civilisation this tendency can sometimes do more harm than good.

You have seen that when your self-assertion instinct is stimulated it brings about certain activity on your part, and if this activity is successful you tend to feel superior or self-important. But when, on the other hand, this self-assertive activity is thwarted or does not meet with success, you feel inferior.

Time after time in the course of life your strivings towards self-assertion are defeated; time after time your self-importance is challenged, and in consequence you feel inferior and inadequate to meet the challenge.

Now with so many attacks on your self-importance, your strivings are largely motivated by your self-assertive tendencies, but this motivation is largely subconscious.

Many of your strivings against the great outside world are attempts—conscious as well as subconscious—to adapt your environment to your own wishes; but the people in this great outside world have their own self-assertiveness, just as self-centred as yours, and, in the mass, vastly more powerful.

The result is conflict, and very often defeat. Another element is added to your inferiority complex; another vestige in the memory-store, being painful, must be pressed down to a level at which consciousness can not reach it.

As a result, either you become more timid or retiring on the

one hand, or on the other you develop along more bombastic and self-assertive lines. There will be effects of some sort in your general life-style, tending frequently towards either one extreme or the other, unless very early in life you have learnt how to handle the whole situation.

Undoubtedly there are some occasions on which your self-assertion centres around someone else's success or defeat. Maybe your young son becomes the best of his school, or perhaps he loses his first job through inefficiency, and so you share his success or failure; but in such cases your feelings of superiority or inferiority arise because something that belongs to you is involved and is an extension of your own ego.

It is your own self that feels superior and enjoys it, and it's your own self that feels inferior and seeks some way or other to feel superior.

Now it is precisely the importance of the self to the self that you must break down if you want to deal adequately with the inferiority complex, and for this reason you must realise that in order to get rid of the inferiority feeling you must get rid also of the superiority feeling. To be free of this feeling of inferiority you must be free of the feeling of superiority.

You will see, then, that the ancient Buddhist teaching of egolessness is very up-to-date; for hand-in-hand with the deep-rooted belief in the importance of one's own self goes the equally deep-rooted assertion of superiority.

As I have already said, it is important to understand the

teaching of egolessness if you want to understand Buddhism. On the other hand, whether you believe in this doctrine, merely because it is a part of the teaching as a whole, is somewhat less important. It's quite unnecessary to believe anything uncritically or to accept anything without thoroughly examining it. What is really important is to realise that you can never achieve any enduring happiness by way of self-assertion.

At the very least, it is necessary to understand and accept the fact that excessive self-assertion causes conflict with others and conflict within your own mind.

On this basis, then, your self-training in this connection is a matter of endeavouring to keep all your actions free—as far as possible—from self-assertion.

You begin by self-observation, for self-observation is the key to self-training. You begin by critically observing your reactions to external events and situations with a view to finding out when and how you assert yourself, and this self-observation must become habitual and continual. You must learn to turn the searchlight of mindfulness onto every one of your actions and reactions.

This increasing mindfulness, this inwardly-directed attentiveness, helps you discover your own mental mechanisms, those of rationalisation and repression, for example, which are motivated by your own reluctance to confront the things in your own mind.

Then, as you gain increased self-understanding, you will

begin to see your own self-assertive tendencies as they really are. You will begin to see yourself pushing to the fore in circumstances which give you an opportunity for self-importance, and hanging back from a duty when that duty arouses feelings inferiority.

The increased awareness and self-understanding will act as a brake when you would otherwise seek a superiority feeling, and will spur you on to action when you'd otherwise hang back for fear of an inferiority feeling. Superiority and inferiority in the subjective sense—that is the feelings of superiority and of inferiority—will gradually disappear and just as gradually be replaced with a true superiority. And this true superiority will be quite distinct from the spurious superiority of the emotions.

As the work of self-observation goes on, you may find it helpful to exert some disciplinary pressure on yourself; and this self-disciplinary pressure will work in three main directions.

First, in thought. You may be offended, for example, by something said to you, or because you have been left out of a conversation, or because your good qualities have not been recognised. You may tend to brood, to reflect unwisely on whatever it is that has hurt you, to dwell on the incident. Thus you magnify its importance, you magnify your own sense of inferiority, and you magnify your own wish to find a feeling of superiority to displace it.

Secondly, in speech. You may be such a good talker that you

are a poor listener, and you may interrupt other people's conversations in order to have your say. Your speech may be full of self-references. When, for example, if the conversation turns to gardens, you boast about your own garden; or if someone mentions having had lumbago, you set out to show that your own lumbago was far more painful and crippling than was the other person's. Thus you tend to blow up your own ego with hot air like a balloon. And thirdly, in action. You may, perhaps, find yourself elbowing to the front because you like the limelight, or else hanging back because of stage fright, both extremes being due to an over-valued ego.

Whether your self-assertion shows itself in thought, in speech, or in action, it's a potential source of unhappiness in some way or other. It lays you open to hurt feelings or deflation. If you work always towards a progressively increasing mindfulness of all of the forms that your self-assertive tendency takes, coupled with a continued effort to control it as and when it arises, you will attain a calm and balanced state of mind in which feelings of superiority and inferiority have no place.

And as these disappear, so also the consequent outward and inward conflicts disappear.

Practical Work:

If you want to place the various things that have been said on a practical basis, I suggest that you set yourself a period of at least a month—or, better still, a period of three months

or longer—and during that period set out to discover and to become more aware of the various ways in which your self-assertive tendencies find their expression—expression sometimes in terms only of thought, sometimes in the form of speech, or at other times by way of bodily action.

It is in the daily round of your work, your domestic life, and your social contacts with other people that the delusion of selfhood does its damage and it is therefore right in the middle of this daily round that you must take the first corrective steps.

When your self-assertive tendencies are curbed by your own understanding and your own will, it's good; when they are curbed by fear or by intimidation by others, it's not so good. You are then not following the principle of non-assertion at all.

However, the essence of the exercise is mindfulness. If you can observe your self-assertive tendencies as and when they arise, so much the better, but, failing that, you can recognise them in retrospect; but the main point is to become aware of them in some way or other.

Place the exercise on a self-disciplinary basis, make a contract with yourself to impose on yourself a small penalty whenever you unreasonably assert yourself, not only in bodily action and in speech, but also in thought.

This element of self-discipline is an important one. You will find that if you merely resolve to correct your self-assertive habits, you will be likely to forget your resolution after a

while. However, if you make a self-contract and, whenever you find yourself unduly asserting your own importance, you go without cigarettes for a few hours or have less sugar in your coffee, you will be more likely to keep to your resolution.

In this way, you will be using the principle of self-discipline side-by-side with the principle of mindfulness.

[Top]

The Ninth Month

The Practise of Thought Control

In most communities the thoughts of the average person are governed by the thoughts of the majority of other average people, and this holds good from early childhood right through to old age. Only to a limited extent does the average person think for himself.

During early childhood you learnt largely by exercising your senses; you looked at things, you listened to sounds, you smelt and tasted things, you touched and handled them, and you experienced physical pain and physical pleasure from them. Thus by direct first-hand sensory contact you became acquainted with the fundamental elements of experience.

When by exploring the world with your senses you found something that yielded pleasure or satisfaction, you regarded that thing as good, and similarly when you encountered something that gave rise to pain you regarded it as evil. Good and evil at this stage were identical with pleasure and pain.

But your elders soon complicated matters for you by scolding you for enjoying your pleasures and by forcing you to do things which, although unpleasant, were called good. As you learnt the language of your elders your concrete concepts of good and evil became further confused with the abstract concepts of right and wrong, while the rightness and wrongness of things were measured by the approval and disapproval of others.

From the beginning, then, your thoughts were governed largely by the thoughts of those about you, conveyed to you by their approval and disapproval.

There were other external influences to shape your thoughts as you grew older, but to a large extent the effects of these later influences—although less definite—followed the patterns laid down in earliest childhood. You tended to approve of those things that were approved by the people you liked and admired, and to disapprove of the things associated with people you disliked.

In your present phase of life, whatever it happens to be, you still largely follow the childhood patterns. Sometimes, perhaps, it may be that you believe a thing because it pleases you to believe it, and not because your reason supports it. Or you believe it because everybody around you believes it, or because, years ago, your parents taught you to believe it.

For the childlike mind, authority forms the only basis for belief; but even if your mind is more mature it probably still

retains old beliefs and builds new ones on inadequate foundations, mainly because you are never called upon to apply the critical function of your reasoning powers to the matters concerned. You take them for granted.

There is a very powerful factor in modern life that continually conditions your thinking, or perhaps your lack of thinking. The patterns and channels of your thoughts are conditioned to a large extent by the continual blare of advertising. This uses both blatant and subtle means to keep at the highest pitch both your desires for sensory enjoyment and your sense of self-importance.

You can realise that it is of vital importance to develop a technique of thought control. In this connection, Buddhist psychology offers a method called bare attention.

This is one of the most important forms of mindfulness. In bare attention, the attention is stripped bare of all emotional biases, prejudices, self-references, and associated thoughts. This emotion-free attention is essential for seeing things as they really are, because emotional biases, prejudices, and uncontrolled associations bring about falsifications or distortions of perceptions.

Bare attention thus means the bare uncluttered awareness of a perception, without any reaction to it in the form of deed, speech, or mental comment.

If you were to examine your normal everyday perceptions, you might find that they are often muddled, cluttered up with mental material that belongs elsewhere, and obscure or

distorted.

Sometimes these falsifications cause misunderstandings, conflict, and discord. You can see that if you apply the principle of bare attention to your everyday thinking, you can reduce the misunderstandings that sometimes occur, together with their consequent conflict and discord.

It is not until you become aware of your own mental functioning that you realise just how widespread and deep-seated your strong emotional biases really are. They are, in fact, so widespread and so deep-seated that without special self-training it is impossible to perceive a sense object, to form a clear idea of a situation, or to recollect an event without some distortion or other.

In the jungle of emotionally-distorted ideas that constitutes a large part of the average mind there are danger zones, and when these are stimulated they give rise to irrational thinking, bad temper, and misjudgements. Any of these can cause quarrels and heartaches when they intrude into your associations with other people.

And it is important to recognise the fact that you cannot as a rule see the danger zones in your mind, because the tangled masses of emotional undergrowth make them inaccessible to consciousness. Until the light of full consciousness can be brought to bear on them, to identify them, and to clear them away, they will remain as danger zones.

Much of this undergrowth was planted during childhood and before, and if you really want to arrive at the detailed

awareness of your own mind in its fullest sense you must learn to break the false emotional connections formed in your early life. It's probable that many buried complexes exist in your mind and are at the root of your irrational behaviour, of your unaccountable likes and dislikes, and of your fears and resentments.

Now it is not my intention to discuss methods of self-analysis or systems of reaching buried complexes. This is specialist's territory and any endeavours to enter the danger zones of the mind by a frontal attack could raise more problems than it solves.

The practise of bare attention, at least in the sense in which we are considering it here, does not make a direct or frontal attack on such problems; it works by establishing a foothold in the observations and perceptions of the present and cleansing these of their biases and prejudices;

and then, as these current experiences are purified, the cleaning-up process extends backwards, so to speak, into the past. In other words, as your current experiences are progressively stripped bare of their retarding emotional clutter, the increased awareness extends to the memory-patterns of earlier emotional experiences.

Whereas a direct frontal attack in approaching a touchy complex is practically certain to fail, the gradual and subtle influence of bare attention seeps through into lower layers of the mind—layers normally inaccessible to consciousness —and cleanses them at their own level. However, it must be

realised that this is not the work of weeks, or months, or years; it must be considered as a process of decades at least; in fact, it is a lifetime task.

There is another point of interest in applying bare attention to that jungle of emotional undergrowth called the human mind. As you employ the technique of bare attention to your current experiences—as you endeavour to keep your present observations and perceptions clear of bias, prejudice, and irrelevant emotion—so your mind itself changes. It is like cleaning a mirror which has accumulated spots and splashes. As you proceed with the cleaning process, so you find the reflection becoming truer and clearer. In the same way, as you gradually clean up the perceptive faculties of your mind, so you enable it to see into itself with greater clarity and so to reach to greater depths.

* * *

This matter of bare attention forms an extremely important factor in the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the core of Buddhism. To make this point clear, let's run through the eight steps.

Right understanding is the first step. In one sense, this is intellectual understanding of the Buddha-doctrine; in another sense it is the understanding of the true nature of existence; while in yet another sense it becomes a direct insight into the ultimate reality beyond all things.

The second step, right thought, is one of the specifically

psychological aspects of the Path, since it involves the control of mental processes. Next in order come right speech, right action, and right livelihood, which three together summarise the moral aspects of Buddhism.

Then comes the sixth step, right effort, which, being the training of the will, is an essential part of Buddhist psychology. The seventh step, right mindfulness, is also psychological, since it comprises the process of perfecting the normal faculty of attention; while the last of the eight steps, right concentration, takes us beyond the realm of normal psychology into the cultivation of supernormal faculties of the mind.

Now it is the second step of the Eightfold Path, the step called right thought, that we're primarily concerned with at present. Right thought is usually described as thought which is free from uncontrolled sensory desires, from ill will, and from cruelty.

To a large extent, mental processes involve the use of words, not only for expressing thoughts but also for formulating them; and therefore the control of these mental processes can be assisted by the use of the verbalised function of the mind.

Before we deal with verbalised thought, however, it will be of interest to consider what Buddhist psychology has to say about the nature of thought in a broad sense, and later on we can discuss the type of thought which uses words as its instruments.

The Buddha-doctrine describes thought (in the sense of the general process of cognition) as a conscious process, as a process whereby various stimuli affect consciousness.

Thought, of course, must always be conscious. There can be no such thing as unconscious thought; and, although we may speak of subconscious mental processes, these processes cannot properly be called thought.

Just as thought must be conscious, so any kind of consciousness must have a stimulus or object. This stimulus may come from outside by way of one of the five physical senses (vision. hearing, smell, taste, and body-sensibility), or it may come from within the mind itself in the form of an idea or a mental image.

Thus, if there be no stimulus (no sound, no odour, no recollection, nor any other sense-object or mind-object), then there can be no consciousness.

Under such conditions, the state of mind that prevails is, in Buddhist psychology, called the mental sub-current; it is that form of mental energy which gives to the body its life, and without this mental energy the body could not live.

It can be visualised as an under-current of mental life from which full consciousness arises. In English writings on Buddhism it is often called the subconscious mind, but to avoid confusion with Western concepts it is better to use the term mental sub-current.

The mental sub-current may be illustrated by a stream of

water flowing placidly and evenly; and, when this flow of water is disturbed, waves arise on the surface. Similarly, when the sub-current is disturbed by stimuli (either external sense-objects or internal mind-objects) then consciousness arises, as waves arise on the surface of the water.

The mental sub-current is the essential foundation of individual life, and without the mental sub-current individual physical life cannot exist. In it are stored the resultant impressions of all previous experiences; and these sometimes enter consciousness in the form of memories.

The sub-current possesses no volition of its own, since volition belongs only to consciousness; but the subconscious mental processes that go on within it are directed by habits which have been formed by conscious will-activity in the past.

During ordinary waking life consciousness seems to be completely continuous, but the Buddha-doctrine teaches that this is not as it seems, since ordinary waking life consists of conscious phases rapidly alternating with subconscious phases.

If we were to look at an electric light being switched on and off many times each second, it would appear to be a completely continuous light, whereas there would actually be a rapid alternation of light and darkness. In the same way, what appears to be continuous consciousness is really a rapid alternation of conscious and subconscious states.

Each mind-state lasts for an inconceivably small fraction of a

second and then passes away, to be followed immediately by the next mind-state. In passing away, each mind-state transmits its energy to the following state, which is thus in some degree similar to its predecessor. But this new mind-state is not necessarily similar in all respects to that which preceded it, for new external stimuli may have arisen.

Thus any mind-state consists of the energy of its predecessor, plus sometimes some degree of modification.

In waking life, consciousness arises from the mental sub-current and sinks back to the subconscious condition millions of times a second, and the rapid succession of these alternating states gives the illusion of continuous consciousness. The unit of time used in describing the processes of cognition is called a thought-moment; millions of thought-moments go to make up a second.

When the mind is in a subconscious state and a strong stimulus occurs, full consciousness may arise, and the process of its arising will occupy a period of seventeen thought-moments.

The following description of the process describes these thought-moments one by one:

- Moment 1: The mental sub-current is evenly flowing below the level of consciousness and the sudden strong stimulus occurs.
- Moment 2: The mental sub-current is irritated or disturbed.

- Moment 3: The mind turns towards the stimulus or object.

  (This stage is called advertance, but it must not be interpreted as attention since as yet there is no mind-consciousness).

- Moment 4: Consciousness of the sense-object now commences, but this is sensation and nothing more, for it occurs as yet only in the physical sense-organ; it has not as yet been received by mind-consciousness.

- Moment 5: The stimulation is now conveyed via the nerve-fibres to the central nervous system and is received into mind-consciousness. This function, called reception, is more or less under the control of the will, and unless it takes place no further perception of the object can occur. In the case of a weak stimulus, it may be possible volitionally to cut it off; but in the case of a strong stimulus it is not normally possible to keep it out of mind-consciousness.

- Moment 6: In the next phase, the function called investigation takes place. Now investigation as ordinarily understood is a process spread over a period of time, so we are not to suppose that in one thought-moment the whole process of investigation of the nature of the sense-object takes place. What is meant is that in any conscious period of this kind, the mental energy seeks to connect up the new sense-object with the existing impressions left by earlier sense-

stimulations. In each succeeding phase of cognition this momentary process is repeated.

- Moment 7: Following on the previous thought-moment's activity (the investigation phase) some degree of connection with the impressions of earlier similar sense-stimulation is effected, and by virtue of this connection the mind is able to begin to classify the particular sense-object. Here again, the process is repeated in each cognitive process until the classification is complete.
- Moments 8 to 14: During the next seven thought-moments, the mind determines an attitude of liking or dislike towards the object, an attitude of either good-will or ill will. This phase in the conscious period is called impulsion; it is mentally the most active part of the process, and to an extent it is under volitional control. During these seven impulsion-moments, reaction-forces are generated within the mental structure, and each separate thought-moment brings into being its own particular kind of reaction force.
- Moments 15 and 16: During a period of two thought-moments, the process is finally impressed or registered on the mind, or in other words it is passed into the memory-store.
- Moment 17: In the final thought-moment, full consciousness ceases for this period, after which the whole process of cognition may be repeated over and

over again while the stimulus lasts.

The above description applies to a strong sensory stimulus, but if the stimulus is very weak there is no more than a slight disturbance of the mental sub-current.

When the stimulus is not a sense-object but a mind-object in the form of an idea or a recollection, the process is slightly different; but the effects of the impulsion-moments are in general the same. Conscious and unconscious periods alternate with so great a frequency that there is an illusion of continuous consciousness.

Now, as the word *thought* is used in the second step of the Noble Eightfold Path—the step called right thought—its meaning is to a large extent restricted to what is called the verbalising function of the mind. We carry out a great part of our thinking by means of words, for words are symbols for ideas, while ideas in their turn are the mental representatives for things, ideas, processes, and abstractions.

Whereas an idea of a complicated thing is necessarily complicated, it can generally be condensed into a simple word; thus while thinking with ideas (in the absence of words) would be clumsy and laborious, thinking with words is much quicker and easier.

Thus thought-control largely means the control of the verbalising function of the mind, of the "inner speech" whereby we silently use words to consider a problem, to reason about it, to reach a decision, and to plan out a line of

action.

We can see, then, that we use words not only to express our thoughts but also to formulate our thoughts. While it can't be said that all our thinking takes the form of silent speech, or thinking in verbalised form, we must realise that a large part of our thinking does take this form.

Obviously, then, if the words we choose to formulate our thoughts do not accurately represent the ideas they are intended to represent, our thinking will be loose and inaccurate, so that any tendency towards self-deception we possess will be accentuated.

Few of us are free from some tendency, however slight towards self-deception. While we are generally aware of the extreme forms of sensory desire, ill will, and cruelty as they appear in our own make-up, we are not always aware of these adverse qualities when they appear in their mild and unobtrusive forms.

Thus when we allow one of these adverse qualities to operate in our mind in a small way, we may tend to gloss it over, to excuse it, and to make no effort to deal with it. We feel it is too unimportant to worry about it.

Yet the small everyday operations of an adverse mind-factor in its minor manifestations strengthen it little by little, and thus lay the foundations for its major appearance at some later time when, perhaps, a crisis arises.

In cultivating the second step of the Noble Eightfold Path,

then, it is essential to watch the small everyday outcroppings of sensory desire, ill will, and cruelty, and recognise them in their many mild and unobtrusive forms. It is almost useless to wait until they appear in their extreme forms, for then they are too powerful to he handled effectively.

As long as we allow our thinking to remain vague and fuzzy, we are unlikely to recognise the lesser forms of adverse qualities. If, on the other hand, we verbalise our thoughts in the form of precise words, we are likely to discover these qualities and can then more easily deal with them.

This brings us to the use of the verbal formula as an instrument in thought control. A carefully-worded or well selected phrase, silently repeated, can act as a kind of mechanical aid to direct the thoughts along a particular channel, or alternatively to divert the thoughts from unsuitable or unwanted mind-objects.

Thus if we are suffering from an acute sense of loss—as for example after a bereavement—it may be helpful to use a phrase like this: It is in the very nature of things that at some time or other we must part from all that is dear to us; and by yearning for a return of that which is past we merely prolong our sorrow.

Of course, the main problem here is to remember to use the formula at the times when it is most needed, for at these times we are generally overwhelmed with our sense of loss;

but this is a matter of developing the habit of mindfulness, which in itself is a major part of Buddhist mind-training.

Ideally, we should not wait until a severe loss occurs to begin to train ourselves in detachment. One aspect of right thought is that it is characterised by mental detachment from objects, people, experiences, memories, and anticipations that give pleasure.

Since ordinary life largely revolves around such things, we generally become enmeshed in the web of attachment, and to break free from this web is normally beyond us.

Thus when a severe loss does occur, it becomes very important to use every aid—such as that afforded by the mental repetition of a formula—to make an adjustment to the new circumstances.

* * *

Now we must admit that thought free from all sensory desire is a good deal to expect from average people, like ourselves, who must live ordinary lives in equally ordinary environments. Perhaps it will help us to understand the problem if we consider what is meant by sensory desire.

Briefly, sensory desire is thought loaded up with the desire for enjoyment by the six senses, namely by impressions of visual objects, by sounds, by odours, by tastes, by body-sense impressions, and by mental reflections on any of these.

Sensory desires include the wish to see a sunset, the lights of

a town seen across a valley, a beautifully patterned wall-paper, or a glimpse of a loved one's face; these are all visual things. Many desires are auditory; the desire to hear a piece of music or even a single chord, the trickling of a mountain brook, or the sound of a loved one's voice. There are desires to experience pleasant perfumes, tastes, and body-impressions, such as of comfortable warmth, and there is the desire to look back on any of these physical sense-enjoyments or to look forward to them.

Now freedom from all these forms of sense-desire would seem to be freedom from all ordinary forms of motivation; and up to a point this is true. Ordinary motivation is based on the desire for sensory or mental enjoyment of some kind; and without the prospect of enjoyment many of our activities would come to a stop.

All this is so, of course; but the Eightfold Path is not the path to ordinary life with its ordinary enjoyments, but to the Transcendental, the realm which lies outside and beyond the relative world that we ordinarily know; and attachment to sensory and mental enjoyment becomes an obstruction to one who is aiming to transcend the relative world.

Nevertheless, for those of us who do not feel yet ready to follow this high aim, some degree of control over the desire for sensory enjoyment is necessary if we are to gain the fullest value from life. While this limited application of sense-control may not involve a complete renunciation of sense-pleasures, it must bring about some degree of

detachment to be of any value; and this detachment, instead of reducing the pleasures of living, increases them by cutting away the grasping tendencies which often tend to vitiate these pleasures.

Sometimes we are advised to be aware of the present and not to live in the past. At first glance this appears to be good practical advice; but when we try to put it into practise, how often do we succeed?

We are told: "Kill in yourself all memory of past experience. Do not look behind you or you are lost." But if we were to follow this literally—assuming it to be possible—the ordinary processes of thinking would cease.

We are told also that: "the past must not control the future, where each minute is a new birth." But if we were to follow this to the letter, we'd be unable to add up next week's grocery bill because we refused to allow our past (during which we learned arithmetic) to influence our future household shopping.

Does this mean that the advice is useless? No. It means we have misunderstood it. What it really means is that we should accept the past with its losses and mistakes, its sorrows and heartbreaks, its joys and pleasures. We must accept the fact that the joys and pleasures of the past had to come to an end at some time or other—this is inherent in the very nature of this universe—and if we look back on them and yearn for them to return, then all we are doing is to vitiate this present moment.

If we look back on a happy event of the past and gain from it the pleasure inherent in a happy recollection or memory, without yearning for its return, memory—as then we are living in the present, for that happy memory as a memory but not as an event—is a part of this very present. As an event, it is part of the past, but as a memory that comes into our consciousness at the present moment then it is in fact our present experience.

As a memory, we may enjoy it without vitiating the present; but if we yearn for its return or its repetition we are divorcing ourselves from the present and trying to throw ourselves back into the past, which at this moment is non-existent.

* * *

So much for the matter of that type of right thought which is called freedom from sensory desires.

Another aspect of right thought is freedom from ill will, or, expressed positively, thought that is characterised by good-will. Sometimes even the most even-tempered of us become annoyed with our fellow-men; and although often this annoyance evaporates when the occasion for it has passed, it sometimes leaves a residue of resentment or ill will which needs special handling.

It is easy to see that no progress is possible to a mind that is poisoned by ill will or hate, or by any of its associated mind-factors such as revengefulness, annoyance, or anger.

* * *

Again, right thought is thought that is free from cruelty. While cruelty often springs from hate or anger, much cruelty also arises through an indifference to the suffering of others or to thoughtlessness. Right thought, then, involves not only the absence of active and positive hate, but also the absence of its more negative and passive indifference to the sufferings of others.

* * *

The second step of the Eightfold Path—right thought—must be based on the first step, right understanding; for it is necessary to recognise right thought as right thought, and wrong thought as wrong thought. Without the attentive mind developed by right mindfulness, right thought is not possible in the fullest sense. Thus you can see that the second step of the Noble Eightfold Path must be carried along parallel with various other steps, and each one is inseparable from the others.

In particular, the practise of right thought must be carried along parallel with that of bare attention, for without the practise of bare attention—an aspect of right mindfulness—all thought processes tend to become cluttered with emotion.

Practical Work:

Bare Attention

In ideal circumstances, if you wished to establish the mental patterns of bare attention in a complete form, you would put aside all responsibilities and all other interests for a period of some weeks and devote yourself to a strict course of self-training. Under such conditions, you would avoid all but the barest essentials in the way of physical work, and you would put aside writing and reading, and even talking as far as possible.

But these ideal circumstances are beyond the reach of most of us. Unless you are fortunately situated, it is probable that you can't find sufficient time and freedom from responsibilities to carry out the strict practises of mindfulness to the exclusion of other activities for a long period. How, then, are you to establish the practise of bare attention?

What you can't do in its entirety, then, you must do in part. Since you are unable to place yourself in ideal conditions, you must use your daily activities as the basis for your inner development; and it may be, in fact, that these daily activities are really more ideal for the purpose than a life of seclusion would be.

In order to establish the mental patterns of bare attention you must slow down some activities. As a starting point you can select one definite activity so that, without

detriment to anything else, you can carry out this one activity more slowly than usual. If you have to catch the 8.17 train every morning, you obviously cannot slow down in that particular activity. If you are a housewife with children to look after you can hardly slow down the chores involved in getting them off to school. Again, if you are a bus conductor you cannot use the peak travelling periods to inaugurate the practise of bare attention.

However, there must be some daily activity that you can use as a basis for the establishment of the practise. There must be some short periods when the pressing urgency of duty subsides for a time.

Maybe the office worker can relax in a cafe at lunch-time, or the housewife can pause for a few minutes once the children have been bundled off to school, while the bus conductor has a few minutes at the depot during which he can smoke a cigarette.

In each of these cases there is an opportunity to make a start on the development of bare attention, even in a small way. The office worker can usually slow down during his lunch time and mindfully observe the weight of the knife and fork in his hands, he can chew more slowly and observe the taste of food, and he can observe the colour and shape of his cup and saucer. And, more important, he can at this time observe his own general muscular state, feeling whether his muscles are taut or relaxed.

In the same way the housewife, when she pauses, can

intentionally slow down the process of making a cup of tea for herself, in order to give her full attention to it. She can then become more conscious of the steam rising from the kettle, of the sequence of her own muscular actions as she makes the tea, lifts the cup to her lips, sips and swallows the tea, and so on. In this exercise in attentiveness she can become more aware of the details she normally misses. These details are unimportant in themselves; the point is that they can supply an opportunity for an increase in mindfulness.

Again, when the bus conductor smokes his cigarette during a few minutes' rest at the depot, he can apply increased attention to the sensation of the cigarette between his lips, to the taste, and to the appearance of the wisp of smoke rising from the glowing tip.

Obviously these small attempts at bare attention will be of little value if they end where they begin. The value of taking one small, frequent or regular occasion for mindfulness and consistently applying bare attention to it lies in the fact that it helps to establish a foothold. Once this foothold exists it is relatively easy to extend the practise to other small things throughout the day. However, to change the simile, it is only the thin end of the wedge, and unless the wedge is driven right home it effects very little.

Your approach to the practise of bare attention, then, should be to select one small thing that you do with some degree of regularity and which you can do more slowly and

mindfully than usual. You should resolve to give this one small activity increased attention for a period; and to do this without looking for results, but purely as an exercise in mindfulness.

You will find, of course, that to make a vague resolution that when an opportunity occurs you will slow down and apply increased mindfulness will be of little use. You will need to be more specific, and you will need to enforce your resolution by a self-imposed penalty.

To be specific, therefore, resolve that during a period or at least a month you will take twice as long as usual over some small task, such as the task of taking off your shoes each night before going to bed. Should you neglect or forget to slow down this one action and to give increased mindfulness to it, you can impose some small penalty on yourself the next day.

Then, later on, you should search for another activity and use it also for the same purpose, slowing it down and giving it increased and sharpened awareness. Once the initial phase is established it will be somewhat easier to give increased attentiveness to other activities without the need for greatly slowing them down.

While this exercise relates mainly to your physical actions rather than to your mental functioning, you will find that it will help in your general overall plan of self-observation, and in this way will reinforce the effects of other practises.
[Top]

The Tenth Month

The Cultivation of Detachment

On looking at life as a whole, you will agree that it is a mixture of pain and pleasure, effort and rest, dissatisfaction and contentment. You would like this mixture to be proportioned differently, of course; you would like to have less pain and more pleasure; you would like a little less effort with a little more rest, and then you would be less dissatisfied and more contented.

But you must realise that without some pain and some sorrow in life there would be no incentive for effort; and without effort you cannot make progress. Without dissatisfaction your life would become too static to be of any ultimate value. It has been said:

The bread of bitterness is the food on which men grow to their fullest stature.

From the Buddhist viewpoint, liberation from suffering can be achieved only by transcending personal existence and by attaining to a state beyond words and beyond thought, a state which is sometimes called the Unconditioned or the

Transcendental. This “existence-beyond-existence” is a state in which all traces of craving, aversion and ignorance have been destroyed, and in this state there is said to be no suffering. The attainment of this “existence-beyond-existence” is the ultimate goal of Buddhism.

However, while the separate self remains—while personal consciousness with its separation from life as a whole still exists—some degree of suffering is inescapable. Nevertheless it is possible to lessen its impact by the cultivation of detachment, or, stated differently, by the progressive reduction of attachment to the pleasures of life.

There is a Buddhist practise which consists of becoming aware, as fully as possible, of the feelings of pleasure and displeasure as and when they arise and at the same time observing them as dispassionately as possible. The aim, of course, of this increased attention is to evaluate more clearly the pleasures and displeasures of life and thus to avoid becoming overwhelmed by them.

Without this dispassionate or detached mental attitude you sometimes tend to become too immersed in your pleasures, and, at other times, to swing to the opposite extreme and become immersed in your sorrows and pains. There are times, perhaps, when you wallow in your emotions and let yourself be completely governed by them.

The objective, then, is to learn to stand off from your experiences both of happiness and of sorrow and to observe them dispassionately, without being swamped by them.

You need to learn to do this in retrospect with regard to experiences of the past, and to try to do so also with experiences of the present just as they come to you; while in the same way you must learn to anticipate the experiences of the future without undue emotion. As you learn the futility of grasping at things of the present and yearning for things of the past and future, so your mind develops greater flexibility.

Whatever you depend on for your happiness is an object of attachment, a prop on which to lean; and whenever you lean on any prop at all you lay yourself open to sorrow. At any time there is the possibility that some of your props will be knocked away, for life has an unpleasant tendency to knock your props from under you.

Your youth disappears in the passage of time; you lose a loved one, perhaps, and the old familiar externals in your own individual world give place to new and strange externals. If your mind is not flexible enough to keep pace with the losses and changes as your props are knocked away, you suffer all the more in consequence.

Generally, however, on looking back, you may find that you manage to keep pace with the changes and the impermanence of life by exchanging one prop for another, so that in the long run you are little better off; you are still dependent on props of some kind.

And this applies not only to the outer world of sense-objects but also to the inner world of mind-objects, for attachment

to memories of the past and anticipations of the future is just as strong a bondage as is attachment to external things of the present.

There is a Buddhist statement that goes like this:

From attachment comes grief, from attachment comes fear. He who is free from attachment knows neither grief nor fear.

The stronger is your attachment to something you love, the greater is the happiness you experience when circumstances allow you to enjoy it; but, when it is wrenched away from you, your suffering then is just as great as your happiness previously was.

If you strongly desire something, this thing becomes an attachment-object. You naturally cling to your attachment-objects, you grasp at them and clutch them tightly when they are away from you, you long for their return. But all that this clinging, grasping, clutching, or longing does for you, in the long run, is to make the sorrow of loss so much greater.

It is axiomatic in the Buddhist philosophy that at some time or other you must part with everything that is nearest and dearest to you, and that the stronger is your attachment to these near and dear things, the harder will be the wrench when it comes.

Once the vice-like grip of attachment is established, it is impossible to break it by philosophising, and the strength of

attachment depends on the strength of the craving for that which has been lost. Once the craving for the lost thing has gained a foothold it cannot be dislodged by theorising, and this craving can arise only when you allow yourself to be dominated by your feelings of pleasure and displeasure.

This is the Buddhist view of attachment and its related factors, a view that can be expressed in a simplified form in this way:

Attachment depends on craving; craving depends on the feelings of pleasure and displeasure; and the feelings of pleasure and displeasure depend on the contact of the senses with the external world.

In ordinary life, it is impossible to solve the problem of attachment by cutting off the contact of the senses with the outer world of sense-objects, and it is equally impossible to prevent pleasure and displeasure from arising once this contact is made. This means that if this chain of ”dependent arising” (or, less accurately, this chain of cause and effect) is to be broken at all, it must be broken at the link of pleasure or displeasure. The chain of sorrow must he attacked at the phase of liking-and-disliking, desire-and-aversion, attraction-and-repulsion.

Now all this, at first glance, seems to mean that you must give up everything that gives happiness or pleasure; but this is not the idea at all. What it really means is that you must learn to be independent of your feelings of pleasure and displeasure, as far as possible, and not to be controlled by

them. It means that your intellect must control your life, not your emotional complexes or your irrational likes and dislikes; and thus it is essential (in the Buddhist technique at least) to become as fully aware as possible of all that goes on in your own mind.

In this technique, an ever-increasing mindfulness of all feelings of pleasure and displeasure as they arise is of great importance. Thus, in the first place, it is essential to be fully aware of the true value of your feelings of pleasure and of their real significance in order to prevent them from causing emotional biases and prejudices.

The same applies, of course, to your feelings of displeasure, for they also tend to give rise to emotional biases and prejudices if not well controlled. Aversion gives rise to craving and attachment just as does desire, and you are just as much in bondage to the things you hate as you are to the things you desire.

If you can reach even a partial degree of detachment, if you can even partially lessen your grasp on the things that hold you in bondage, you are then more free to enjoy them without attachment, and for the same reason your sense of loss will be less when they have gone.

The fully-alert mind can make an objective assessment of each experience as and when it arises; but for many of us this dispassionate self-observation cannot be made at the time and can be made only in retrospect. But whether you make it at the actual time of the experience or afterwards,

the main thing is to prevent your pleasures and your displeasures from controlling you.

Once a strong emotional charge of a pleasant or unpleasant nature becomes attached to an idea, this emotional charge can easily get out of hand and cause all sorts of inner disturbance and outer conflict. Only by increased mindfulness can you free the mind from the false emotional associations and the consequent disturbance and conflict.

The cultivation of detachment, then, aims at freedom from emotional domination and from the domination of pleasure and displeasure; it aims at freedom from attachment to external things, from memories and anticipations, from desires and aversions, and even from the desire for detachment itself.

Practical Work: The Cultivation of Emotional Detachment

In the human mind there are many blind spots—blind spots which are sometimes the causes and sometimes the effects of prejudices and emotional biases—and because of these the mind is unable to see itself as it really is. Such blind spots prevent us from realising the extent and ramifications of our false attachments, and any device that we can use to

reduce them is an aid in the work of inwardly-directed mindfulness.

The following questionnaire is meant to be such a device and to aid you in the process of discovering and evaluating your own attachments.

In answering the questions, you may find that the first answer that comes to mind may be the correct answer or it may not. Therefore it is desirable that you go through the full questionnaire about six times during the month; allow it to start trains of thought rather than trying to arrive immediately at clear-cut answers.

A question that is difficult to answer will as a rule be of much greater value to you than one which is easy to answer. The real value of the answer lies, not in itself, but in the amount of self-observation or mindfulness employed in arriving at it.

There is no need to try to make your answers consistent in any respect. You must realise that normally you have ambivalent attitudes towards many of the important things in life; for example, you could both love and hate the same person at different times, or you could feel attracted to one aspect of something and repelled by another aspect of it.

With ambivalent attitudes of this kind, it may be that one of the two contrary emotions has been repressed, but from some consciously-inaccessible region of your mind it continues to influence your mental life.

It is impossible to isolate your objects of attachment from your sense of possessiveness, your valuations, your self-assertiveness, or various other aspects of your mental life. The questions which follow, therefore, are intended not to pinpoint specific objects of attachment, but to help you to develop a greater awareness of your own mental contents; and in the process, specific objects of attachment—and perhaps of misplaced attachment—may emerge.

Here, then, are the questions:

1. Do I agree with the following statement? "From attachment comes grief, from attachment comes fear. He who is free from attachment knows neither grief nor fear."
2. Am I unduly attached to material possessions, as a whole, or in other words do I have a possessive attitude to them?
3. Am I possessive with regard to other people—my family, my children, my friends, for example?
4. Do I desire power of some kind, not for what I could accomplish with such power, but purely for the sake of having power?
5. Do I have any attachment that interferes with my mental and emotional tranquillity?
6. Am I selfish or self-centred in any particular sphere of life?

7. Am I more dominated by emotional bias and prejudice than is the average person?
8. Do I like to dominate my friends, children, and other people?
9. Do I resent being dominated by others?
10. Am I too attached—rigidly or inflexibly so—to my beliefs and opinions in any sphere of thought?
11. Am I held back in any way by an excessive or misplaced attachment to anything or anyone?
12. Do I like people to admire certain of my possessions to which I am attached?

Any form of dispassionate observation—whether directed inwardly towards the mind itself or outwardly towards the world of events—is an aid in the cultivation of detachment. As a specific exercise in mindfulness, you can endeavour to apply the principle of dispassionate observation to your relationships with other people.

Sometimes you misunderstand something that another person says or does, perhaps because you happen to be upset or annoyed about something quite different. In such a case you give to the other person's meaning completely false colouring. Or perhaps you misinterpret a question, and give an answer which more properly applies to an altogether different question.

In this practise, then, and in your daily contacts with other

people, you set out to pay unbiased, dispassionate observation to the other person's meaning, uncoloured by your own emotions or prejudices. You will often find that the true meaning is quite different from your own first interpretation of it.

You may find it necessary to train yourself not to interrupt others without good reason. Few people are good listeners, and you maybe one of the few. If you are not—if you hear only half of what another is saying, and if you tend to interrupt with irrelevant side issues—then you need to teach yourself to listen, as far as possible, without allowing your own emotional associations to interfere.

Good listening demands effort, for good listening means listening to all of what is said and interpreting it as correctly as possible. In the process of good listening you will learn to pinpoint any emotionally-charged words and ideas that arise, words and ideas that bring into play your own biases and prejudices. Thus, by pinpointing such words and ideas, they will no longer be able to work from the subconscious levels of your mind, and thus you will gain greater knowledge and control of your own mental processes.

The practise of dispassionate listening, then, consists largely of careful and attentive listening, coupled with an endeavour to keep free from emotional reactions.

Assuming that you are employing the self-contract method of self-discipline, look back every few days to see if you have used the questionnaire consistently and in a

sufficiently penetrating manner, and if you have carried out the practise of dispassionate listening to a sufficient extent. If you feel that you have not done so, deprive yourself of some small pleasure.

[Top]

The Eleventh Month

The Attainment of Tranquillity

In his evolutionary history man has attained to the dominant position in his world by virtue of his intellect; but nevertheless he's been governed largely by his instincts and emotions. Man's primary motivation has come from his self-preserving and race-preserving urges towards fighting, escaping, mating, and so on. His intellect has functioned, in part at least, by steering him where his instincts have urged him to go. However, without his instincts and emotions, man would never have survived. It has been said:

> Were it fully understood that the emotions are the masters and the intellect the servant, it would seem that little could be done by improving the servant while the masters remained unimproved. Improving the servant does but give the masters more power of achieving their end." (Herbert Spencer)

These primitive urges, then, have served a purpose in man's evolution, but in general they are appropriate to primitive conditions; they were evolved under primitive conditions,

and in many ways they fail to fit into the circumstances of civilised life. Thus for further human progress and for the fulfilment of man's potentialities, it now seems that his motivations must be transformed and refined.

Progress so far has been racial rather than individual; that is to say, it is mankind as a whole that has progressed or evolved, and the individual in most cases has been simply a unit in the evolving race. Now, however, it appears that many individual human beings have reached a point at which their progress along the evolutionary path is largely in their own hands.

Thus it seems that some of us have reached a point at which our further evolution can be consciously motivated and individual, rather than unconsciously motivated and racial.

Nevertheless the primitive urges are still with us, still integral parts of our mental make-up; and in one way or another they are responsible for a great deal of our emotionally-biassed thought processes and for many of our falsely-coloured mental attitudes. They are at the root of many of our inner disturbances and of many of our conflicts with others. In this way, these primitive urges—once the essential factors in our earlier evolution—are now (to some extent) retarding factors. They can become obstacles to the attainment of tranquillity.

The Buddha-doctrine stresses a number of mental fetters and various inner hindrances which prevent the mind's proper functioning, and therefore stand in the way of

tranquillity. Among the retarding factors are scepticism, the feeling of separate selfhood, and ill will; these, and others, are spoken of as the paralysing defilements of the mind.

Let's consider these obstacles or retarding factors one at a time, beginning with scepticism. From the Buddhist standpoint, scepticism is a state of mental rigidity, and this condition is no better than the opposite one of gullibility. The middle way between the extremes of scepticism and gullibility is a state of mental flexibility, a state of readiness to examine new or strange ideas and to evaluate them without pre-judging them.

Scepticism or rigidity of mind is an obstacle to tranquillity because it is a refusal to examine and evaluate new ideas without emotional pre-judgement. The dominating emotion in many cases may be a feeling of superiority, or there may be some kind of fear or an element of resentment towards the source of the new ideas; but, except where the intellect is incapable of grasping the new ideas, the rigidity is due to the domination of emotion of some kind or other.

The conception and conceit of selfhood is another obstacle to tranquillity. According to the Buddha-doctrine the self is an illusion. It has been said:

The self is a label with nothing attached to it.

You may agree with the theoretical considerations of this "doctrine of egolessness," as it is called, or you may not; this is unimportant at this stage. The important thing is your own inner attitude, your own feelings about it. As you feel

for the sufferings of others (and for their enjoyments too), so to that extent you have broken down this obstacle, the illusion of selfhood.

As further progress takes place, the focus is slowly and gradually removed from self-centred interests and transferred to the welfare of life as a whole; and, as the steel grip of self-centredness loosens, so an inner tranquillity begins to take the place of anxiety, resentment, and self-assertion.

This inner tranquillity may not yet show itself outwardly in the form of completely calm and unruffled behaviour. It is felt at first as a still centre, even though there is yet a great deal of turmoil around it, and to establish this still centre is the first stage in the attainment of tranquillity. It can be expressed in this way:

Enlightenment is the one still point in the centre of the turmoil, just as the axle is the one still point in the centre of the moving wheel.

Now another obstacle to tranquillity is ill will, and this includes all grades of ill will, from the mildest and almost unnoticeable resentment up to the most raging fury. While you probably think of it as ill will directed towards the people you dislike, you must recognise that ill will towards your problems and your circumstances can be just as great an obstacle to tranquillity as is ill will towards people.

It is essential, then, to approach all your problems with an attitude of goodwill, and to break down all resentment

towards them. This applies to the bills you have to pay and the unpleasant chores you have to do, just as much as to the people who have harmed or hindered you in some way, and equally to the impersonal things that have caused you delays and worries.

A mental attitude of non-resistance towards the difficult things in your life will help in this respect; but this does not mean that you must cease to resist them physically if you feel they are wrong. A mental attitude of non-resistance does not mean a cessation of effort towards improvement; what it does mean is breaking down of anxiety, resentment, and self-assertion, which are the primary causes of mental tension.

As a mental attitude, non-resistance must be applied to anything and everything that comes into your life—to the people you meet, to the jobs you must do, and to the problems you have to solve. If you resist your daily work, if you find it too boring, too unskilled for your talents, too much like drudgery, then this resistance will bring about greater fatigue; and so it will form a vicious circle.

Life presents you with many opportunities to learn, but these opportunities are often disguised as drudgery. It has been said:

Drudgery is as necessary to call out the treasures of the mind as harrowing and planting those of the earth. (Margaret Fuller)

If then, in doing something irksome, you can realise that it

may enable you to call out the treasures of your mind, then the attitude of non-resistance will follow. If, in dealing with someone you dislike, you can use the occasion to develop goodwill, you will thereby take a step towards tranquillity. And if you are in a difficult situation, or even a painful one, and you are determined to learn from it everything it has to teach you, then you will have learned the secret of the great attainment. This secret of the great attainment is to love whatever you hate.

So, with greater flexibility of mind instead of rigid scepticism, with the understanding of the illusionary nature of the self, and with the growing ability to love whatever you hate, then you have made a good start. You have begun —in theory at least—to break down some of the main obstacles to tranquillity.

There are other obstacles, of course. There is conceit, which is just an over-valuation of the separate self—an over-valuation of a delusion, according to the Buddha-doctrine. There are envy and stinginess, which again spring largely from the self-delusion; and there is agitation the churned-up state that comes from anxiety, resentment and self-assertion.

Now you can deal with all these obstacles to tranquillity, in the Buddhist technique, by mindfulness and self-discipline combined. Mindfulness in this connection means dispassionate self-observation; it means an honest recognition of the retarding mental factors in whatever guise they appear. Self-discipline involves a gentle yet

persistent effort to keep them in hand without harmfully repressing them.

All this reduces itself to a matter of forming new habits and thought-patterns and breaking old ones.

The task may become easier and more specific if you take one of your own mental factors at a time and subject it to observation for a period, to the exclusion of other factors.

For example, it is possible that in the course of your daily life various occasions arise which cause you to become agitated or flustered; minor critical situations arise from time to time. If you train yourself not to be easily agitated—to refuse to panic—then your judgements will be more accurate, your decisions more wise, and your life more harmonious.

To begin, you must at first form the habit of observing yourself closely to discover when and under what conditions you tend to become agitated. You may be serving behind the counter in a shop during a rush period, with an impatient customer making things difficult; you may be driving a car when the engine stalls at a busy intersection; or you may be looking after some troublesome children. In such circumstances, you tend to become more agitated than you realise.

You need first of all to become aware of this fact, and with this increased awareness a gradual improvement will come about. This natural improvement can then be assisted, as necessary, by a definite effort of self-discipline.

The attainment of tranquillity, then, is not a matter of finding ideal circumstances or of finding freedom from outer disturbances. It is a matter of discovering the inner mental obstacles to tranquillity (one by one) by dispassionate self-observation, and of removing them (one by one) by a gentle yet persistent effort of self-discipline.

Practical Work: The Dispassionate Observation of Emotion

To become a little flustered during a minor crisis seems—and generally is—only a small failing. So also are slight anger against frustrating circumstances, mild anxiety, and a limited degree of conceit. These are all normal and small failings, even if they are not ideal states of mind.

If any one of these minor mental factors is allowed to become excessive, it becomes pathological. It is one of the main tasks of mindfulness to bring about a precise and clear-cut awareness of emotional states when they are mild and ill-defined, for at this stage they are far easier to control than when they reach a pathological degree.

At any stage, not only in their extreme forms, these mental factors are obstacles to the attainment of tranquillity. At any stage they need to be kept under close observation.

For a period of at least a month, then, observe yourself closely with a view to discovering the emotional factors within yourself that prevent you from attaining tranquillity. This self-observation will help you to understand and thus to control those emotional factors that work against tranquillity.

Several times during the month you should decide that, for a period of two or three days, or even a single day, you will make a mental note of all the emotions you experience during that period. You can regard these as experimental periods in which you try to hold a mental attitude of pure observation, at least as far as conditions allow.

As an aid to dispassionate observation, it is helpful to identify and name each emotional state as it arises, if possible, or if this is not possible, to do so in retrospect. It will help to keep it in check if you can pause, observe yourself critically, and say to yourself "I am becoming envious," or "I am becoming agitated." The idea is to register the fact clearly in your mind without becoming further disturbed by it and without either feeling guilty about it or excusing yourself for it. The simple process of clearly naming the mental condition will sometimes help you to deal with it.

This may not necessarily be so of course, in the case of strong emotions, but its greatest value is in the recognition of mild ones whose significance may be much greater than at first appears.

In your home life, in your work, and in your social contacts with other people, you must of necessity react by word and action of some kind, but during the experimental period you must try to make these reactions as free as possible from emotional biases.

But more important than the outer reactions of word and deed are the inner reactions of thought. You must observe your currents of thought to see how much misplaced, inappropriate, and excess emotion they contain, how much they are biassed by prejudices, and how much inner conflict they express.

This self-observation, growing more and more dispassionate, will bring you greater harmony within your own mind. You will tend to react to things with less misplaced or excess emotion, and thus with less inner conflict and less misunderstanding. The greater harmony in your relationships with other people will in itself repay the effort of mindfulness involved.

Assuming you are working on the self-contract method of self-discipline, you can impose on yourself a small penalty whenever you become lax in this form of self-observation.
[Top]

The Twelfth Month

The Practise of Clear Comprehension

In developing an efficient approach to the problems of life, one of the first essentials is to reach a clear comprehension of what you really want from life. You could simplify—or over-simplify—the answer to this question by saying that all you want from life is happiness. On the other hand, you could enumerate a multitude of hopes and ambitions which might become so complicated and so mutually contradictory that you would need to undertake a lengthy process of self-analysis before you could sort it all out.

Some sort of answer half-way between the too-simple and the too-complex is what is really wanted. Without a well-defined understanding of what your central aim in life is, that is to say, without a clear comprehension of motive, as it is called in Buddhist psychology—there is a tendency to sink into the unthinking drift of life; and once caught up in the unthinking drift your whole life lacks focus.

To know what you want is very important. To know why you want it is also very important, and it will help you to do

this if you understand in theory the nature of your desires, their origins in the instincts, and the emotions associated with them.

To understand your emotions and desires, you must first understand your instincts. These instincts are inherent tendencies to act in specific ways in specific circumstances. The instincts themselves exist below the level of the intellect —that is to say, below the level of your conscious reasoning processes—and being so much older than the intellect (in an evolutionary sense) they are so much stronger.

While your instincts are subconscious, your emotions and desires are conscious—sometimes too much so. In fact your emotions and desires are upthrusts into consciousness from your instincts. An instinct is like a volcano; it exists largely below ground level, but when it becomes active it throws lava and smoke upwards. In the same way, an instinct exists below consciousness, but when it becomes active it throws emotions and desires upwards into consciousness.

You can see, then, that the emotions and desires are upthrusts into consciousness from the instincts; but an emotion is not the same as a desire. An emotion is a comparatively vague and diffuse form of awareness at the level of bodily sensation, while a desire is a form of awareness at a higher level, at the level of ideas.

Your desires are, in fact, ideas of a sort; they are ideas of activities you want to carry out or else ideas of sensations you want to experience.

Thus if you are angry you have the idea of striking out at something; this can be called a motor idea, an idea of muscular activity, and it is aroused by the instinct of aggressiveness.

Again, if you are hungry, the sensory idea of food arises in your mind, energised or aroused by the inherent tendency to eat when the body requires food.

Perhaps the classification into motor desires and sensory desires—into desires to act and desires to experience—is an over-simplification; perhaps all desires include both motor ideas and sensory ideas; but the main point in the present context is that a desire exists at the ideational level of the mind while an emotion exists at the level of diffuse bodily awareness.

Let's look at it in this way; when one of your instincts becomes active your body automatically prepares itself for the appropriate activity by various changes. You become aware of the bodily changes, and the diffuse awareness of them constitutes an emotion.

At the same time, some specific idea of undertaking some action or undergoing an experience may arise in your mind; this also is a result of the instinct which has been aroused. This idea is emotionally charged—that is to say, it is exercised by the energy of the instinct—and thus it becomes a desire.

In sub-human life all activity is primarily instinctive, and whatever intellect does exist is directed towards finding

ways to satisfy the instinctive promptings.

In human life the situation is not basically different from the situation in sub-human life, but it is vastly more complex. Most activity is primarily motivated in the first place by the instincts, represented in consciousness by the emotions and desires. The intellect functions mainly by seeking ways—most often very devious ways—to gratify the desires and to produce pleasant emotions. This means that the intellect functions mainly by seeking ways to satisfy the instincts. The instincts are like the engines of a ship while the intellect is like the rudder.

Very little activity, if any, is motivated primarily by the intellect, and intellectual motivation is secondary to instinctive motivation.

Thus your thoughts, your beliefs, your opinions, and your plans—these are all largely conditioned by the way you feel, by what you like and dislike, by what you want to do, and by what you want to avoid.

So you see that most of your thinking is emotional thinking, and very little of it is objective or dispassionate thinking.

In emotional thinking, facts and observations are falsified or wrongly coloured by desires and biases and prejudices. On the other hand, in dispassionate thinking—what little of it there is—the same facts are seen clearly and the same observations are unbiased and free from desires and prejudices, with no false colouring.

In emotional thinking, you tend to believe a thing because it pleases you to believe it or to reject an idea because it displeases you. In objective thinking you accept an idea if it is reasonable, whether it pleases you or repels you, and you reject an idea, however much you like it, if it fails to measure up to reason; or at least you accept it only tentatively and in an experimental spirit.

It is true that one of the main factors that gave primitive man his supremacy over his sub-human rivals and enemies was his intellect, his ability to use ideas as tools with which to reason, and to use simple words as shorthand symbols, so to speak, for complex ideas.

At the same time it is important to realise that, when opposed to emotions and desires, the intellect shows up as a relatively feeble and sometimes ineffective force. Emotions and desires are upthrusts into consciousness from the tremendous instinctive forces, and even the most powerful intellect may find itself powerless in the face of such opposition.

To control a desire by simple will-effort, then, is often very difficult, sometimes impossible, and at times perhaps harmful.

It is difficult when the desire is anything more than a superficial one. It is impossible when the desire serves as an outlet for a powerful instinct. And it may be harmful when the desire serves as an outlet for an instinct which has been denied other outlets. This is especially so when there is a

guilt sense or a feeling of shame acting as a repressing force.

It is then that extensive and deep-reaching self-understanding becomes necessary in order to understand and control your desires; but you cannot deal adequately with strong desires unless you train yourself to handle the small desires that crop up from time to time in your everyday life.

While some forms of Buddhist mind-training can be best undertaken in a quiet and secluded environment, others can be woven into the fabric of everyday concerns and thus can be made an integral part of these concerns.

The practise of clear comprehension is one of the latter kind, for it has considerable scope for application in the busy workday routine.

While the term clear comprehension is fairly self-explanatory, it would be well to discuss, for a short time, what it means in terms of Buddhist mental culture. In the first application of the term, clear comprehension means the clear comprehension of the motive or purpose of an activity.

In other words, whatever you are doing, you should clearly comprehend why you are doing it. Instead of having a vague or fuzzy idea of what you expect to achieve by it you should try to get a clear-cut idea of its purpose, which is to say a clear-cut idea of the desires that prompt you to carry out the activity.

Secondly, having clarified your mind as to the motive of an

activity, you should get an equally clear-cut idea of whether or not it is really suitable for its purpose. Thus the Buddha-doctrine shows the need not only for a clear comprehension of the motive of an action but also for a clear comprehension of the suitability of the action for its purpose.

Thirdly, there is the need for absorbing the element of clear comprehension into every activity. In other words, the whole of one's life, embracing every activity and every experience, is the domain of mindfulness, and thus, by extending the domain of mindfulness into every activity and every experience, the whole of life becomes the basis for mental culture.

Finally there is a form of mindfulness called the clear comprehension of non-delusion. The full implication of this clear comprehension of non-delusion involves the fundamental Buddhist teaching that the separate self is a delusion; thus the clear comprehension of non-delusion is a sharpened awareness that breaks through self-deceit and penetrates right through the illusion of selfhood to the reality of one's own being.

* * *

Let us now return to the first kind of clear comprehension, the clear comprehension of motive. When you apply this to the whole of your life, to your hopes and desires, and to all your planning and striving, it presupposes that you have some fundamental purpose in life. You may not have an overall motive in your life, however; you may be caught in

the unthinking drift, and if this is so the first thing to do is to become aware of this fact, and if possible to define some kind of overall motive.

Assuming however, that you have such a motive or purpose in life, it's desirable, in the interest of efficient living, that you give thought to your activities as a whole to see if they line up with the focus of your life or whether they take you into all sorts of unprofitable side-issues.

This is not to say, of course, that you cannot have side-issues; these are unavoidable in ordinary life. There are many things you have to do, quite contrary to your central purpose, which left to yourself you would never even think of doing; yet because of your need to earn a living or your responsibilities and duties towards others, you must do those things.

Now if you allow the need to do these things to build up resentment and annoyance, they certainly will take you aside from your central purpose, whereas if you use them as opportunities to develop patience and tolerance you then bring them into line with your central purpose.

Thus by the clear comprehension that every experience is the domain of mindfulness you can make the best use of activities that otherwise would be unprofitable.

While it may not be easy to define your ultimate objective in life, you can generally define the immediate purposes of your everyday activities. You know why you always catch a certain train every working morning; you know why you go

to work; and you know why you must earn money. You know also why you buy the necessities of life, and perhaps you know why you also buy some of the luxuries of life.

Do your luxuries really make life more enjoyable? Some of them do; others make life more difficult. These are the luxuries you must buy for their prestige-value, because your neighbours have them, perhaps, or because in your social set you are expected to have them. But these luxuries may become burdensome necessities, and because they must be paid for and maintained, they cost more than they yield.

This is where the clear comprehension of non-delusion comes into the picture. To what extent are you motivated by self-assertion, for the desire for prestige and approval?

Perhaps having found the answers to these questions, and having found them to be not very flattering, you find you must continue to do things of no ultimate value. Because of family obligations, or responsibilities to others, or business necessities, you must continue to do things that cut across your fundamental purpose in life. You have applied the principle of clear comprehension of suitability and found certain activities quite unsuitable for their ultimate purpose; but such situations are often unavoidable.

But at least you are not deceiving yourself. It is when you unmindfully take on unnecessary activities—activities that cut across your central purpose—that you sink into the unthinking drift. The important thing, then, is freedom from the unthinking drift, and the key to this freedom is clear

comprehension—the clear comprehension of the purpose of an activity and of its suitability, the clear comprehension that every activity is the domain of mindfulness, and the clear comprehension of that non-delusion.

This is the Buddhist practise of clear comprehension in its various forms.

Practical Work: Recognition of Motive

In the path to self-understanding you will find that it is of great importance to gain a clear comprehension of the true motives of your various activities. It is in the sphere of motivation that the human mind finds perhaps the greatest scope for self-deceit, and in consequence self-centred anxiety, resentment, and self-assertion are often at the base of activities which on the surface seem to have nobler and less self-centred motives.

Your practical work for this period then, consists of constant endeavour to become critically aware of the fundamental motives behind your everyday activities. An activity which appears to you yourself and to others to be generous, full of goodwill, and devoid of self-interest, may on self-examination prove to be motivated by self-centred anxiety, resentment, or self-assertion in some form; and the

recognition of your true motives is an essential part of self-understanding.

The exercise of a constant endeavour to become critically aware of these motives is, as you can see, essential; but this constant endeavour may tend to become swamped by the pressure of everyday concerns. This is where the self-contract method of self-discipline will prove most useful. To apply it, every day throughout the period of a month you will look back at the day's main activities and critically examine your various motives. When you fail to do this, impose on yourself some small penalty.

THE BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY

The BPS is an approved charity dedicated to making known the Teaching of the Buddha, which has a vital message for all people.

Founded in 1958, the BPS has published a wide variety of books and booklets covering a great range of topics. Its publications include accurate annotated translations of the Buddha's discourses, standard reference works, as well as original contemporary expositions of Buddhist thought and practice. These works present Buddhism as it truly is—a dynamic force which has influenced receptive minds for the past 2500 years and is still as relevant today as it was when it first arose.

For more information about the BPS and our publications, please visit our website, or write an e-mail or a letter to the:

Administrative Secretary
Buddhist Publication Society
P.O. Box 61
54 Sangharaja Mawatha
Kandy • Sri Lanka
E-mail: bps@bps.lk
web site: http://www.bps.lk
Tel: 0094 81 223 7283 • Fax: 0094 81 222 3679

Table of Contents