

Mental Diet | Purification of Thought

Dharmapada - The Buddha

1. Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox.

2. Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with a pure mind a person speaks or acts happiness follows him like his never-departing shadow.

The 7Day Mental Diet

- Emmet Fox

(Dr. Emmet Fox was a new thought teacher, author, healer and minister in the 1930's.)

The subject of diet is one of the foremost topics of the present day in public interest. Newspapers and magazines teem with articles on the subject. The counters of the bookshops are filled with volumes unfolding the mysteries of proteins, starches, vitamins, and so forth. The whole world is food-conscious. Experts on the subject are saying that physically you become the thing that you eat — that your whole body is really composed of the food that you have eaten in the past. What you eat today, they say, will be in your bloodstream after the lapse of so many hours, and it is your blood-stream that builds all the tissues composing your body — and there you are. Of course, no sensible person has any quarrel with all this. It is perfectly true, as far as it goes, and the only surprising thing is that it has taken the world so long to find it out; but in this article I am going to deal with the subject of dieting at a level that is infinitely more profound and far-reaching in its effects. I refer of course to “mental” dieting. The most important of all factors in your life is the mental diet on which you live.

It is the food which you furnish to your mind that determines the whole character of your life. It is the thoughts you allow yourself to think, the subjects that you allow your mind to dwell upon, which make you and your surroundings what they are. As thy days, so shall thy strength be. Everything in your life today — the state of your body, whether healthy or sick, the state of your fortune, whether prosperous or impoverished, the state of your home, whether happy or the reverse, the present condition of every phase of your life in fact — is entirely conditioned by the thoughts and feelings which you have entertained in the past, by the habitual tone of your past thinking. And the condition of your life tomorrow, and next week, and next year, will be entirely conditioned by the thoughts and feelings which you choose to entertain from now onwards. In other words, you choose your life, that is to say, you choose all the conditions of your life, when you choose the thoughts upon which you allow your mind to dwell. Thought is the real causative force in life, and there is no other. You cannot have one kind of mind and another kind of environment. This means that you cannot change your environment while leaving your mind unchanged, nor can you change your mind without your environment changing too. This then is the real key to life: if you change your mind your conditions must change too. Your body must change, your daily work or other activities must change; your home must change; the color-tone of your whole life must change, for whether you be habitually happy and cheerful, or low-spirited and fearful, depends entirely on the quality of the mental food upon which you diet yourself. Please be very clear about this. If you change your mind your conditions must change too. We are transformed by the renewing of our minds. So now you will see that your mental diet is really the most important thing in your whole life. This may be called the Great Cosmic Law, and its truth is seen to be perfectly obvious when once it is clearly stated in this way.

I do not know of any thoughtful person who denies its essential truth. The practical difficulty in applying

it, however, arises from the fact that our thoughts are so close to us that it is difficult, without a little practice, to stand back as it were and look at them objectively. Yet that is just what you must learn to do. You must train yourself to choose the subject of your thinking at any given time, and also to choose the emotional tone, or what we call the mood that colors it. Yes, you can choose your moods. Indeed, if you could not you would have no real control over your life at all. Moods habitually entertained produce the characteristic disposition of the person concerned, and it is his disposition that finally makes or mars a person's happiness. One must be determined to cultivate a good disposition (wholesome states) One must train oneself in the habit of thought selection using one's own freewill. This will be exceedingly difficult for the first few days, but if you persevere you will find that it will become rapidly easier, and it is actually the most interesting experiment that you could possibly make. In fact, this thought control is the most thrillingly interesting hobby that anyone could take up. You will be amazed at the interesting things that you will learn about yourself, and you will get results almost from the beginning.

Many people knowing this truth, make sporadic efforts from time to time to control their thoughts, but the thought stream being so close, as I have pointed out, and the impacts from outside so constant and varied, they do not make very much progress. That is not the way to work. You must make a commitment to form a new habit of thought which will carry you through when you are preoccupied or off your guard—as well as when you are consciously attending to your business. This new thought habit must be definitely acquired, and the foundation of it can be laid within a few days, and the way to do it is this: Make up your mind to devote one week solely to the task of building a new habit of thought, and during that week let everything in life be unimportant as compared with that. If you will do so, then that week will be the most significant week in your whole life. It will literally be the turning point for you. If you will do so, it is safe to say that your whole life will change for the better. In fact, nothing can possibly remain the same. This does not simply mean that you will be able to face your present difficulties in a better spirit; it means that the difficulties will go. This is a way to alter your life. Now do you realize that by working in this way you do not have to change conditions. What happens is that you apply the practice, and then the

conditions change spontaneously. You cannot change conditions directly. This then is your prescription. For seven days you must not allow yourself to dwell for a single moment on any kind of negative thought. You must watch yourself for a whole week as a cat watches a mouse, and you must not under any pretense allow your mind to dwell on any thought that is not positive, constructive, optimistic, kind. This discipline will be so strenuous that you could not maintain it consciously for much more than a week, but I do not ask you to do so. A week will be enough, because by that time the habit of positive thinking will begin to be established. Some extraordinary changes for the better will have come into your life, encouraging you enormously, then the future will take care of itself.

The new way of life will be so attractive and so much easier than the old way that you will find your mentality aligning itself almost automatically. But the seven days are going to be strenuous'. I would not have you enter upon this without counting the cost. But it is only for one week in your life, and it will definitely alter everything for the better. For the rest of your life here, for all eternity in fact, things will be utterly different and inconceivably better than if you had not carried through this undertaking. Do not start it lightly. Think about it for a day or two before you begin. Once you do start you must go right through for the seven days. That is essential. The whole idea is to have seven days of unbroken mental discipline in order to get the mind definitely bent in a new direction once and for all. If you make a false start, or even if you go on well for two or three days and then for any reason "fall off" the diet, the thing to do is to drop the scheme altogether for several days, and then to start again afresh. There must be no jumping on and off, as it were. You must positively count every lapse, and whether you do or not, Nature will. Where there is a lapse you must go off the diet altogether and then start again. Now, in order, if possible, to forestall difficulties, I will consider them in a little detail.

First of all, what do I mean by negative thinking? Well, a negative thought is any thought of failure, disappointment, or trouble; any thought of criticism, or spite, or jealousy, or condemnation of others, or self-condemnation; any worry of sickness or accident; or, in short,

any kind of limitation or pessimistic thinking. Any thought that is wholesome and constructive in character, whether it concerns you yourself or anyone else, is a negative thought. Do not bother too much about the question of classification, however; in practice you will never have any trouble in knowing whether a given thought is positive or negative. Even if your brain tries to deceive you, your heart will whisper the truth. Second, you must be quite clear that what this scheme calls for is that you shall not entertain, or dwell upon negative things. Note this carefully. **It is not the thoughts that come to you that matter, but only if you choose to entertain and dwell upon them.** It does not matter what thoughts may come to you provided you do not entertain them. It is the entertaining or dwelling upon them that matters. Of course, many negative thoughts 'will come to you all day long. Some of them will just drift into your mind of their own accord seemingly, and these come to you out of the race mind. Other negative thoughts will be given to you by other people, either in conversation or by their conduct, or you will hear disagreeable news perhaps by letter or telephone, or you will see crimes and disasters announced in the newspaper headings. These things, however, do not matter as long as you **do not entertain them.** In fact, it is these very things that provide the discipline that is going to transform you during this week. The thing to do is, directly when the negative thought presents itself — release it. Turn away from the news, turn out the thought of the unkind letter, or stupid remark, or what not.

When the negative thought floats into your mind, immediately release it and think of something else. Best of all, think a wholesome thought. A perfect analogy is furnished by the case of a man who is sitting by an open fire when a red-hot cinder flies out and falls on his sleeve. If he knocks that cinder off at once, without a moment's delay to think about it, no harm is done. But if he allows it to rest on him, under any pretense, the mischief is done, and it will be a troublesome task to repair that sleeve. So it is with a negative thought.

Now what of those negative thoughts and conditions which it is impossible to avoid at the point where you are today? What of the ordinary troubles that you will have to meet

in the office or at home? The answer is, that such things (negative experiences or conditions) will not affect your diet provided that you do not accept them, by fearing them, by believing them, by being indignant or sad about them, or by giving them any power at all. Any negative condition that duty compels you to handle will not affect your diet. Go to the office, or meet the cares at home, without allowing them to affect you. (None of these things bring me to negativity), and all will be well. Suppose that you are lunching with a friend who talks negatively — do not try to shut him up or otherwise snub him. Let him talk, but do not accept what he says, and your diet will not be affected. Suppose that on coming home you are greeted with a lot of negative conversation — do not preach a sermon, but simply do not accept it. **It is your mental consent,** remember, that constitutes your diet. Suppose you witness an accident or an act of injustice let us say — instead of reacting with pity or indignation, refuse to accept the appearance at its face value; do anything that you can to right matters, give it the right thought, and let it go at that. You will still be on the diet.

Of course, it will be very helpful if you can take steps to avoid meeting during this week anyone who seems particularly likely to arouse negativity in you. People who get on your nerves, or rub you up the wrong way, or bore you, are better avoided while you are on the diet; but if it is not possible to avoid them, then you must take a little extra discipline — that is all. Suppose that you have a particularly trying ordeal before you next week. Well, if you have enough spiritual understanding you will know how to meet that in the spiritual way; but, for our present purpose, I think I would wait and start the diet as soon as the ordeal is over.

As I said before, do not take up the diet lightly, but think it over well first. In closing, I want to tell you that people often find that the starting of this diet seems to stir up all sorts of difficulties. It seems as though everything begins to go wrong at once. This may be disconcerting, but it is really a good sign. It means that things are moving; and is not that the very object we have in view? Suppose your whole world seems to rock on its foundations. Hold on steadily, let it rock, and when the rocking is over, the picture will have

reassembled itself into something much nearer to your heart's desire.

The above point is vitally important and rather subtle. Do you not see that the very dwelling upon these difficulties is in itself a negative thought which has probably thrown you off the diet? The remedy is not, of course, to deny that your world is rocking in appearance, but to refuse to take the appearance for the reality. Judge not according to appearances. A closing word of caution: Do not tell anyone else that you are on the diet, or that you intend to go on it. Keep this tremendous project strictly to yourself. When you have come through the seven days successfully, and secured your demonstration, allow a reasonable' time to elapse to establish the new mentality, and then tell the story to anyone else who you think is likely to be helped by it. And, finally, remember that nothing said or done by anyone else can possibly throw you off the diet. Only your own reaction to the other person's conduct can do that.

The Rules

1. Refuse to dwell on any negative thoughts or feeling. Refuse to indulge in any disempowering questions, demeaning vocabulary or metaphors.
 2. When you catch yourself beginning to focus on the negative, immediately snap yourself out of it and change your thinking or state. You can do this by asking an empowering question, such as "What's great about this?" or "What else could this mean?". Or you can reframe any negative thoughts that come up, for example, if you catch yourself saying "I am worthless", you would replace it with, "I'm creative!"
 3. Be certain that you completely focus on solutions and not problems that you face in life. The minute you see a possible bummer/challenge, immediately focus on what the solution could be.
 4. If you catch yourself indulging in or dwelling on an unresourceful thought or feeling- don't beat yourself up. There's no problem with this as long as you change immediately. However, if you continue to dwell on unwholesome thoughts or feelings for more than a minute, you must wait until the following morning to restart the ten days over.
 5. Journal daily before sleep, so that you can remind yourself of your accomplished progress.
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