



The Dhamma Is A Positive Force

Many people today speak of positive and proactive thinking. These phrases may convey different meanings in special contexts. In our discussion today we will discuss them from a perspective of the Buddha's Dhamma.

Question:

Modern social psychologists speak of positive thinking. How does one understand positive thinking?

The phrases 'positive thinking and 'proactive thinking' usually conjure up ideas about economic and financial activity. They are, however, prone to misunderstanding. From a perspective of the Buddha's Doctrine positive and proactive thinking may be understood as the status of being free from thoughts such as: "I cannot do this", "This is difficult for me", "I do not have the ability", "I do not possess sufficient accumulated merit", "I am too weak," and such thoughts that freeze motivation which helps one achieve realization of the Dhamma.

In other words, proactive and positive thinking would bring forth the will and determination: “I can do this”, “I understand that”, “I have the ability”, “I have the motivation”, “I will succeed.” They drive one’s mental and physical strength towards success.

Positive thinking is mentioned today in connection with every endeavour. The Buddha, however, explained its meaning and power in His discourses. On a certain occasion, He said: “Meritorious Bhikkus, if you develop the mind well, its power can even split the great Himalayan Mountains. So, is it a difficult task to van-quish ignorance (*avijja*)? Aim at such development of your mind and van-quish ignorance.”

Now, that is an example of positive and proactive thinking at its best. We need to cultivate that. We would perhaps find it convenient and effort-free to avoid enterprising activity and yield to a negative mentality. That would propel us through an indeterminate journey in *samsara*, the state of perpetual wandering in a series of rebirths. From a perspective of the Dhamma, positive thinking is the utter confidence we build to achieve a meritorious goal.

Question:

Is there a similarity between the modern science of psychology and the Buddha’s Doctrine?

Firstly, ‘virtue’ (*sila*) – which is a mode of mind, and volition, ‘concentration’ (*samadhi*), ‘wisdom’ (*pañña*), and the way in which a person can become free from defilements through personality development are fully discussed in the Dhamma.

They are outside the scope of modern psychology. Modern psychology is developed to deal with the reduction of anxieties and fears of neurological and sociological origin. It does not address the area encompassed by the Dhamma.

Thus, one does not find parallels between modern psychology and the Buddha’s teachings about consciousness (*viññana*), impression (*phassa*), feeling (*vedana*), craving (*tanha*) and clinging (*upadana*).

Question:

The popular thinking about the Buddha’s Doctrine is about its emphasis on suffering, impermanence and the loathsomeness of the physical body. Is there truth in the belief that these are negative thoughts?

Contemplating upon suffering, impermanence and loathsomeness of the physical body is not negative thinking. We have discussed and understood ‘negative thinking’ as attitudes that prompt a person to feel: “I cannot achieve”. Understanding the concepts of suffering, impermanence and loathsomeness of the physical body is coming to terms with reality. Shutting one’s mind to this reality is wrongful thought (*miccha sankappa*).

Wrong thoughts comprehend life as pleasure, permanence and self. Developing a mentality contrary to the view of reality and considering pleasure, permanence and existence of self do not constitute a positive approach to life.

A test for one's positive attitude is a mind that remains unshaken by the impact of the eight conditions that arise with worldly life: gain, loss, honour, dishonour, happiness, misery, praise and blame. In the Supreme Buddha's words: "A mind remaining unshaken at the impact of conditions that arise with worldly life, a mind without sorrow or fear, is a superior mind. Fortunate and happy are these minds." (*Phuttassa loka dhammehi – cittam yassa na kampati – asokam virajam khemam – etam mangalam uttamam.*)

Thus, comprehending impermanence and reality are not negative concepts. Seeing negativity in them is a wrong thought.

Question:

In today's society one meets people attending retreats and practicing meditation. Some of them go about with a sense of relinquishment. Can that be considered a positive mentality?

If people who attend retreats and meditation practices go about as if they are dejected with life, it could be the result of non-understanding the Dhamma. In many parts of the world today, meditation has become an acceptable practice to reduce

mental stress and achieve calmness of mind. There are intellectuals who are not necessarily followers of a particular religion but who have understood the beneficial effects of meditation.

Society sees more harm coming from those who do not practice the Dhamma. Most anti-social lifestyles can be attributed to a segment of society that has distanced itself from the Dhamma.

When one understands the Dhamma and lives it then attending retreats and practicing meditation will make one's life glow with a sense of fulfilled realization. Such a person would hardly go about with an attitude of dejection. One would, on the contrary, develop a mind that remains unshaken by the impact of conditions that arise with worldly life.

Question:

Did all who realized the Dhamma in the Buddha's Dispensation possess positive mentality?

All who realized the Dhamma in the Buddha's Dispensation possessed positive mentality. They did not think or say: "We cannot achieve this. We have no time for that. We have not accumulated enough merit. We are lacking in aspirations." No such person realized the fruition of the Path. All who achieved understanding Dhamma possessed positive mentality.

Sona was a Bhikku ordained by the Buddha. Over a period of many years he made every effort to understand and realize the Dhamma, but he was unsuccessful. He paced up and down walkways until his feet hurt and bled. One day he concluded that he could not realize the **Dhamma** and that he should revert to the status of a layman and performs whatever meritorious deeds he could.

The Supreme Buddha saw this desperate thought of **Sona**, and using His supernatural powers appeared before the discouraged monk. He said, “**Sona**, as a layman you excelled in the performance of music on the **Vina** (lute). Is it not true that all the strings in that instrument must be in tune to make proper music? Could you have performed if the strings were too tight or too loose? Thus, meritorious **Sona**, you would have to calm your mind and achieve a sense of balance in mentality. You strive to achieve your goal of realizing the Dhamma with a mind that is thus balanced and composed.”

Only a positive mind can realize the Dhamma. The positive minds of the children **Sunita** and **Sopaka** who were born to **Chandala** families, of Patacara the young woman from the aristocracy, of **Ambapali** the courtesan, of **Angulimala** the highwayman, made it possible for all these people to move to the right path and become **Arahats**. It is only through positive minds that people become **Arahats**.

Question:**What special qualities must one cultivate to realize the Dhamma?**

One must cultivate certain qualities to attain realization of the Dhamma in one's lifetime. First of them is faith, *saddha*, in the Supreme Buddha – that He possessed such and such superior qualities. Then one must understand His teachings – what the teachings deal with. One takes refuge in the Dhamma. There was a community of Noble Disciples in the past that followed the footsteps of the Buddha and attained the fruition of the Path. There is such a community at present. There will be one in the future. Then, one must develop a faith in the Buddha's community of Disciples.

One who takes the Three Refuges – Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha and conducts his or her thoughts and life according to the Doctrine is a person who will attain understanding and fruition of the Dhamma....



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