

# Aberdeen Unitarian Church

## THE CHALICE SCHOOL OF CONTEMPLATIVE MEDITATION



### SESSION No. 2

### MEDITATION AND POSITIVE THINKING

#### Introduction

"Mind is the Master power that moulds and makes,  
And Man is Mind, and evermore he takes  
The tool of Thought, and, shaping what he wills  
Brings forth a thousand joys, a thousand ills: -  
He thinks in secret, and it comes to past:  
Environment is but his looking glass."

(Opening verse from James Allen's book 'As a Man Thinketh')

A warm welcome to our **School of Meditation**.

In this session we will be dealing with the power of thought, the way thought shapes our lives, and in particular, positive thinking and the part meditation plays. That is, the way that meditation can direct our thoughts so that we can more effectively bring about the best within ourselves.

Much is written today about positive thinking, but it is believed that many people still look upon it as a process of woolly thinking, fantasy, and people just playing mental games - not to mention the sniggering that goes with it. And the remark, which often follows: 'I've tried that positive thinking stuff and it doesn't work.' Which really means that they tried it for a few days, or perhaps at the most, a few weeks, expecting to undo years of negative thinking. So they tried it and it doesn't work. But think for a moment of the logic of this. They expect to overcome literally years of negative thinking by only a few days of trying (if they really do try) positive thinking - it just does not make any sense. But herein lies the main problem, and one that many writers of positive thinking are up against.

In this session we hope to show that positive thinking can and does work when given a chance to work, but more than that, we seek to show that positive thinking can be greatly enhanced through a process of right meditation.

You may be familiar with the well know verse:

"Man sows a thought and reaps an action.  
He sows an action and reaps a habit.  
He sows a habit and reaps a character.  
He sows a character and reaps destiny."

This is the purpose of this session - the sowing of the right kinds of thoughts. If we accept, as our basic premise, as outlined in our first session, that meditation is a mental process - that it is, according to the dictionary definition, 'to consider thoughtfully, deeply, to reflect upon, to revolve in the mind', then the whole process of positive thinking can be seen as to naturally follow on from this. It is also the mind elevated to consider spiritual ideals and principles. Especially is this so when meditation is used to reflect on a particular subject so as to realize its spiritual significance, and then this realization can be directly related to our own lives. In other words, the sowing of the right kind of thought seeds to produce the right kind of action.

### **WHAT IS POSITIVE THINKING?**

There are many different views on this, however it is generally agreed that positive thinking is a turning round of the mind, to see the other side of the coin so to speak - to see the tumbler half full rather than half empty. It's not refusing to recognise the negative, as some people imagine, but rather refusing to dwell on the negative. This is very important to realise. It is a way of thinking that looks always for the best. However, positive thinking can take on a more profound meaning for us when combined with meditation. Not many writers on the subject have gone into this aspect very much. However, Norman Vincent Peale comes very close to it when he says: "All the resources you need are in your mind. They are established in consciousness waiting to be summoned". And he adds: "The Divine force is in the mind, and it is only in the mind that a human being can have contact with God. A drawing upon spiritual power takes place through the intellect, through the ability to think and believe. Therefore the greatest of all resources, that of God's power, is available through a spiritually controlled operation of the thoughts process." He then concludes by saying: "When anyone can be persuaded to think spiritually, to have faith and to believe, then the mind, being motivated to a higher level, opens to maximum strength and the amazing powers it possesses go to work on situations to bring about good results." (**You can if you think you Can** - pp215-218)

But this kind of thinking is nothing new. The aphorism, "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he," comes readily to mind. "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12.2) "All that we are is the result of what we have thought." (The Buddha)

But let us look at just how the effects of thought can have on us - both in a negative way and in a positive way. We are what we think - I have no doubt about that. We can make ourselves or break ourselves by how we think. James Allen, in his book 'As a Man Thinketh' writes: "Man is made or unmade by himself; in the armory of thought he forges the weapons by which he destroys himself; he also fashions the tools with which he builds for himself heavenly mansions of joy and strength and peace. By the right choice and true application of thought, man ascends to the Divine Perfection; by the abuse and wrong application of thought, he descends below the level of the beast. Between these two extremes are all the grades of character, and man is their maker and master." (P5)

We could go on to give countless other examples of how people are affected by how they

think, but perhaps it is best to give a brief account from my own experience.

I was brought up in a good working class background. I didn't do all that well at school. When I left at the age of 15 I didn't have any 'O' levels or 'A' levels, in fact I didn't know what they were. I left feeling rather insecure, not knowing what I was good at. I drifted from job to job. When I was working at a hospital (having returned from Australia and India) I came across a newspaper add about a course for mature students. I wrote an entrance essay, and was accepted. I struggled through two years of study to achieve an 'S' level for University entrance. Went to University, received my degree, and then went on to do my ministry training. It wasn't easy, but the point of this was that I could not have even have dreamed of this if it wasn't for a change in thinking. From the moment I picked up the paper and began to think of the possibility of doing something with my life, this started a chain of thinking that led me to see things differently about myself. It was the first real step on a journey - a journey that hasn't really ended. And I am certainly not unique I this. I am sure that many people have found themselves in a similar situation.

Did meditation help in this - yes, I believe it did. For years I had been reading books on positive thinking, but it wasn't until I combined positive thinking with meditation that something started to happen. Perhaps I wasn't serious enough. Perhaps what was needed was some serious thinking - deeper thinking - meditation. Perhaps I did not consider thoughtfully enough. And again this is the point. When we do combine positive thinking with meditation we have a wonderful tool for achieving the best out of life.

But think of this for a moment, I could have wallowed in my situation and blame all sorts of things, the environment, the people, where I lived, the fact that I did not have a real education - and I have met many people who do this. But I had a choice, and it is this same power of choice that we all have which can start us on a new journey - if we want to.

The power of thought affects both character and circumstances. Many people blame the way they are brought up as the to the reason why they are the way they are. Also by how they think they find themselves in situations of their own making - they are tossed this way and that way, with all their likes and dislikes, their ups and downs, whims and fancies. It's quite tragic at times and it is almost Re something from a 'soap'.

So can we do something about it? The power of positive thinking is very real, and can have a profound effect on our lives, but let us combine it with some good positive meditation to help us.

## **MAKING A BEGINNING**

How then do we begin? Let us first take an example. Suppose things are generally getting us down, life is becoming a bit too much for us to cope with, we are running around getting nowhere, and we need an all-round inner cleansing and thought directing to get us going again. Basically we need some inward peace so that we can maintain a balance in our lives. We choose a positive affirmation that depicts our situation, which emphasises of course the positive side. We write it down on a piece of paper, and read it out to ourselves slowly to get into it. (Let us use the one that we have been using in these sessions - 'peace - be still'. This is also easy to memorise.)

1. We repeat it several times to get the general idea.

- 2.

We then say it mentally very slowly to digest it and take it into ourselves. We do this

about ten times. (When we repeat any affirmation always make it in the affirmative as if it was a reality now.)

3. In this next stage we go into the silence and let it sink into our subconscious minds. We cease repeating the affirmation and just remain at peace.
4. When we find our minds starting to wander, we then repeat the process - repeating the affirmation, saying it mentally, and then entering the silence.

But in all this try to keep it simple. Try not to strain - let it happen. And only do it for about ten minutes. The period of silence should always be longer.

(A word about the power of the subconscious. The subconscious knows no difference between an actual fact and an imaginary one - it will react accordingly. The secret is to get the affirmation deep enough so that it can surface again on a conscious level as a reality, not just as a vague hope or dream. We do this by constantly going into the silence - by meditating on the quality that we want to achieve. But it has to be given a chance to sink to that level where we can make things happen. However, in order to cement it as part of our new way of thinking we must also act on it. If we don't act on it, it then just becomes a part of the subconscious dream again - not knowing fantasy from reality. It needs a constant reminder, so we do it on a regular basis until by a process of repetition (and being consistent) and then letting it sink into the subconscious. Once the subconscious learns to accept the new knowledge about yourself, and knows that you are not playing games, it then becomes a reality. Things start to happen.)

## **HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE FOR THINGS TO HAPPEN?**

How long does it take for things to begin happening? This is a difficult question to answer, simply because some of the things that tend to influence us have been built up over many years, and have become a part of us. So we should not expect a new and better self to emerge overnight. However, we can take some positive steps to speed up the process.

Maxwell Maltz, a plastic surgeon, wrote a book titled *Psycho Cybernetics*. He found that when he had performed some plastic surgery on certain patients, they still carried the emotional scars. He also found that they would take about three weeks to become accustomed to their new improved selves. When he related this to changing ways of thinking and behavior and to positive thinking in general, he found that the nervous system cannot tell the difference between an imaginary event or an actual event, it will react accordingly as if it was a reality. From this he found that the creative imagination can be used to create a new and improved self, and that about twenty-one days were required in order to do this. However, I think that we also need to be realistic about this. Some things go quite deep, and we need to be patient with ourselves. However, by using regular meditation we will greatly enhance the process.

## **A POSITIVE MENTAL ATTITUDE**

Positive thinking is a creative process. However, it is important to constantly remind ourselves that it is not denying the negative, but rather refusing to dwell on it. It is a process of thought that prefers to concentrate on that which is good, true, and beautiful - always seeing in adversity the equivalent or a greater benefit. But let us also be realistic about this. If someone lost a limb, positive thinking will not make that limb grow back again, however, from every adversity, with the right mental attitude, we can build up a strong resistance that will help us to keep, keeping on.

If you think of it, it is not so much the things in life, which affect us, rather it is our attitude to those things, which affect us. - And herein lies the problem. It is attitude - attitude - attitude. Rather than purposely and constructively acting towards things and events that happen to us, most people re-act - and very often it is in a negative way. Most reactions do not involve any real thought process. Having the right mental attitude means quietly thinking and considering the implications, and not a quick reaction, which is often blind and impulsive. It is reverting to the instincts and senses, instead of reason. A good friend used to always tell me, 'In all things be positive'.

In a world that leans more to the negative side it is important that we try to address the balance - at least with ourselves. We will never be able to put the world to right, but we can put ourselves on the right track by how we think - and from right thinking, the right kind of action will naturally follow.

### **POSITIVE ACTION - doing it**

It is said, do the thing and you will have the power - basically the power to control ones own destiny and life - not power to manipulate and control others. And in meditation, and this is important, if the right kind of action does not follow then there is something wrong with the meditation. If, at the end of the day, meditation, contemplation, and all the other spiritual qualities we hoped to attain, does not make us better people, then we have to go back and evaluate our motives.

Meditation, together with the Right Mental Attitude, helps us to basically cope with life and the many demands life places upon us. Our whole demeanor changes. We see things differently. We can face up to those things that may have previously made us shun away.

Meditation then must result in a positive approach to life. And, as was said, if it does not, then we must look again in what we are doing. Positive thing must, of necessity, go hand and hand with right action, for if it does not, then can we truly say it is really positive thinking and not mere wishful thinking?

### **GUIDED MEDITATION - BRINGING THE LIGHT DOWN**

- 1. We begin by breathing slowly - by paying attention to our breath.**
- 2. Now as you breathe in mentally say 'peace', and as you breath out mentally say 'be still'. Don't force it. Keep it simple. Breathe in, say 'peace', breathe out, say 'be still'.**
- 3. As you breathing gets deeper, with each breath in, say 'peace', peace', peace'; and as you breath out say, 'be still', 'be still', 'be still'.**
- 4. Keep breathing this way for a few minutes to help us wind down and mentally relax.**

**PAUSE**

**We still breathe slowly, but easily.**

- 5. Now focus your attention just above your head - still breathing slowly. Visualise a ball of glowing white light just over and above your head. And with each inhalation, breathe the light down over you body. And with each breath out we mentally circulate the light around the body. We breathe in, focusing our attention just above your head, and breathe out, circulating the light round the**

**body.**

**Do this for a few more minutes.**

**6. Now go back to your steady breathing again - nice and slowly, but without straining, 'peace- be still', 'peace - be still'.**

**PAUSE**

**7. Now focus on your breathing again - take a few deep breaths. Think of where you are. Take your time, and start becoming aware your surroundings. Breathing deeply, and when you are ready we gradually focus on our surroundings and open our eyes. Do this in your own time.**

Now this exercise is named 'Bringing down the Light', as well as our first one, 'peace-be still', is a preparation for meditation and contemplation proper. But first try these exercises - they are a great help for relaxation and a preparation for things to come.

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## **CONCLUSION**

It is important to note that we could not possibly deal with all aspect of positive thinking in only one session, however we have dealt with the essential parts. What is important is to see how meditation can help us with all aspects of our lives - including how we think.

Meditation itself is essentially a positive process - it is thinking in depth, seeing the ideal, and quietly absorbing the spirit or the truth. And when we join meditation and positive thinking together we are gradually building up a philosophy of life that can withstand all that life can throw at us. We start to see things in a new light, and gradually, but almost imperceptibly, we start to think and act in a more positive way.

The process of meditation is to realize an ideal - it is the search for truth, however we define that search. Some call it a vision, a great thought, a purpose in life. Meditation helps us to find that for which we are seeking. In conclusion I quote from James Allan again, from his book 'As a man Thinketh':

"He who cherished a beautiful vision, a lofty ideal in his heart, will one day realize it. Columbus cherished a vision of another world, and he discovered it; Copernicus fostered the vision of a multiplicity of worlds and a wider universe, and he revealed it. Buddha beheld the vision of a spiritual world of stainless beauty and perfect peace, and he entered into it. "Cherish your visions; cherish your ideals; cherish the music that stirs in you heart, the beauty that forms in your mind, the loveliness that drapes your purest thoughts, for out of them will grow all delightful conditions, all heavenly environment; of these, if you but remain true to them, your world will at last be built."

And then he adds:

"Dream lofty dreams, and as you dream so shall you become. Your Vision is the promise of what you shall one day be; your Ideal is the prophecy of what you shall at last unveil."