Training the Mind

"By training the mind you see your own face more clearly."

These days mind-training is seen as something new, but in Buddhism we have always talked of mind-training. Surely, since the day you were born, you have been training your mind. Your mind has been trained by your mother teaching you how to drink milk; on that first day your education began. So I do not think it is only Buddhists who talk about mind-training. If only Buddhists train your mind then what were your parents training? Was it body training or speech training? When you look carefully or in greater detail, there are no subjects that do not involve mind training. When you go to primary school, on the first day you are training your mind how to read, how to count, etc. That is called mind-training.

Mind-training is not something strange or unusual that has only been discovered in recent years. Surely all humans have been trained in different ways, such as in university education for example. They are all educations where you trained your mind. Perhaps you say, "Oh, but that has nothing to do with the mind. That is brain training". Are the mind and the brain really two different things? Or are they the same? When we teach someone about cleaning, talking, acting, conversation, language - all these daily things - they are all part of training and really all have to do with your mind. If you did not have a mind, how could you be trained to use speech, for example. I think we have to understand that we have all done mind-training to various degrees. There are just different types of mind-training

Buddhist mind-training has more to do with the benefit of the training. Buddhism puts together all the positive things that you already know within yourself and then emphasises that there is good, bad, and maybe neutral. You put different values on the things you have already trained to do, and the things you are practising. Perhaps you have the habit of watching and copying other people's actions without thinking whether these actions were right or wrong, or whether their speech is right or wrong, and whether these things have positive benefit or not.

If you copy and do not analyse, then you are just like a parrot. Parrots can copy human voices very clearly when they are trained to do so, but the parrot does not see the value of particular words. It just uses what was taught in order to get food. It does not see the words as right and wrong or the meaning of the words. In our everyday life we act very freely in any way we wish. We say, "I have the right to act this way, the right to say this." It is based on what you know or how you have been trained. This sometimes makes people happy, sometimes upset. That is our worldly life of speech and actions.

Of course, in the mind you have constant thoughts, good and bad. You make judgements and sometimes you judge falsely and make many mistakes in your thinking. In Buddhism everything you think is mostly considered positive or negative, right or wrong, because of

what it is going to lead to. Sometimes we need to imagine what would happen if we were going to act out our thoughts. Then we see that maybe they would lead to something negative. Therefore in Buddhism we are mostly trained to think positively. Once you are trained in this way your actions will improve due to your positive thinking. Positive thinking in this case means not harming others, not upsetting others and instead creating happiness.

This relative happiness leads to ultimate happiness. Ultimate happiness is not the kind of happiness where you gain something which then later causes suffering. The principle is that your training should not lead to actions which are negative. Your actions should become a continuation of all that is positive and therefore, in Buddhism, mind-training is about whatever leads to ultimate happiness. This happiness is not like eating a piece of sugar, which makes you feel happy but then later ends up making you sick. In that case happiness has led to unhappiness. Mind-training is about how to improve your life, not just for one or two minutes but for the whole of your life, from birth to death. This is what we mean by mind-training.

If you want to train your mind, it is important to analyse yourself. We cannot train ourselves according to another person's mind. Therefore, when we talk about mind-training, we are training ourselves how to have a better understanding, how to see ourselves more clearly. Mind-training is like looking at yourself in a mirror, when you have a particular idea of what the beauty of a face should be. Without a mirror you cannot see your own face. Often you see a beautiful boy's or girl's face and say, "I wonder what kind of face I have?" You try for many years to see your own face, but you are never able to see it. Then one day you find a piece of mirror and you look at your face and say, "Oh, after thirty years, is this what my face now looks like?" You analyse and you see that there is something wrong with your nose, something wrong with your eyes. Some people may think it is not too bad, at least not as bad as they had thought. For others it is terrible. They cannot bear to look at their face and they find powder and paint to put on it and go to great effort to hide it. Some people are so worried that they look in the mirror every hour. As soon as they have had their morning cup of coffee they are checking their face in the mirror. Girls are so worried and spend so much money. They have no food for their children, but they still have lipstick and nail varnish. You have covered up your face and you are thinking it does not look so bad. But then tomorrow it is the same problem again. You still have not solved your problem. Nowadays you can have surgery, but that is expensive and only lasts a few years, so again you end up with the same problem.

Mind-training is looking into your life. It is not like putting on lipstick or painting your face, mind-training is about how to improve your understanding. What does that mean, to improve our understanding? It is like a good sculpture, like a good artist, a famous artist. Do you know what is now the best sculpture you can see? Toilet paper! Rolls of toilet paper placed one on top of another, and several rusty cars on top of each other. This is called good sculpture! For some people it is perfect because the artist has transformed rubbish which people do not want to see. By putting it together and through acceptance of it, and because he or she is very famous, now people say, "That is so beautiful!" So, if you understand this and you accept yourself, no matter how ugly your face is, you can think of it as modern art! Once you accept yourself - my nose is crooked, my eyes are one up and one down, it is

modern art! Nobody can copy this look. I am the only one who looks like this. If you become proud of yourself, then all that paint and expense is no longer necessary.
You have become free.

Mind-training is about how you can bring yourself freedom, how you can become flexible rather than rigid. We are brought up very rigid, especially if we are educated people. Educated people are the most rigid. If you are an educated person then, when somebody gives you fish to eat, you are only willing to eat it with a fish knife. If you get steak, you need a steak knife. For soup you need a soup spoon. If you have dessert, you need a dessert spoon. If you have a cup of tea, you need a teaspoon. You have such a complicated life. I cannot understand why you need one kind of glass for whiskey, another glass for brandy, another for wine or water when you have to drink. It all goes in your mouth! Why do you have to make things so complicated and expensive?

If you go to the East, for example to Tibet, people only have one bowl to put their food in. They do not have six or seven plates, three or four types of knives, three or four spoons. They have one of everything, and it is so much more flexible. It really does not matter how you eat, as long as your stomach is full!

So much of our life is made up of these sorts of traditions, and they are the cause of constant suffering in our lives. If you want to invite important people, then you think, "Oh, I'm inviting these respectable people. I need all these cups, knives, spoons, glasses!" You feel that if you do not have these things you cannot invite these people and you are a failure.

We make life more complicated, and everything is becoming a matter of education. We feel that if we are not taught or educated we become paralysed. We do not have our own instinctive thinking. It is already blocked. Now it is almost impossible to develop if you did not go to school and did not learn in a classroom. You need a class for cooking.
We do not need cooking lessons in Tibet. You can do without cooking lessons, as long as you can put a few things together and the taste is nice. Then you have no need to read recipes: French recipes, German recipes, English recipes. To become a cook you need seven years' training, whereas in the East when we are hungry we are able to cook without much training.

Here you also have education movements. You even teach how to give birth to a child. Surely even a cow or any other animal knows that. They do not have to go to school to learn that. It is a natural thing that you do not need education for. Now mothers think that they do not know how to give birth unless they go to classes, and then they have to learn how to look after their children. Of course, in order to learn to read and write it is necessary to go to school, but there are so many things that have become a matter of training. There are shows on television teaching you how to dress nicely. This is all a kind of mind-training, but none of it has any real value in the end. You learn things and soon they are forgotten. Training becomes like a form of entertainment.

The more that population increases, the more people need. They look for some subject to present as training so as to have a better income. People make things up, such as the

Japanese tea ceremony to teach people how to drink a cup of tea. Once everything becomes a matter of education, if you want to do something on your own, you may think, " I can't do this. I have not been to the right classes!" Very simple things like sewing, cooking, knitting are all examples of this attitude. We do not allow for our own natural growth, our own expression.

I think this has overwhelmed our lives, and many of the things we learn do not have much use. What I mean is that, if we want our lives to be useful, we have to understand what human value is. Why are we born as human? What is a human meant to achieve? What is a human capable of and who am I? What are my capabilities? I think we have to ask these questions of ourselves, rather than asking anyone else. People always ask questions to others, they do not think for themselves or analyse. Sometimes people come to see me and ask, "Can you please tell me why I was born as a human being?" How would I know, if you do not know yourself? I do know that humans are capable of changing their future lives, but that needs mind-training.

Mind-training is not something outside of you. If you have constant thoughts arising and you keep following them, then thoughts are taking over your life. Instead you train your thoughts and conduct an internal dialogue, "I need to slow down my mind. What do you think?" You want to know what your motives are for mind-training. You say to your thoughts, "I'm not willing to listen to you all the time. I'm not willing to always do what you want. If I do, then I want to know whether that is going to be the right thing." That is a way of giving yourself time to think. By giving yourself time you will be able to choose the things which are less harmful to you and less harmful to others.

Whether you carry the name "Buddhist" or not is not important. If you want to know what a Buddhist is, it means someone who thinks with compassion, someone who presents compassion, someone who wishes to help through compassion. Such a person is a Buddhist, whether he describes himself as a Buddhist or not. If you do not have compassion, or if you have some compassion but are unwilling to use it, then you are not a Buddhist.

When we look at all the international spiritual traditions, we see that they are all based on compassion. There is no religion that teaches how to be angry, or teaches how not to develop compassion, how not to develop tolerance. Generally when we say, "This is a good person," or "this is a bad person," it is a judgement that we make, based on whether that person has compassion, or whether that person has patience and diligence. If he or she has these things, we say this is a good person. If a person is always angry and saying bad things to others then that person is considered bad. So good and bad are defined by what we believe in both a worldly and a spiritual sense.

By training your mind you try to change by analysing yourself. You ask yourself what kind of person you are. You look harder to see your own face more clearly. When you understand your identity, then you collect all the positive things and learn how to grow by training your mind. You also learn how to stop all the negative and harmful things by training your mind. Looking at positives and negatives is a very good way to analyse yourself. People always

think, "I'm a good person. I think good things." There is a simple exercise you can do to find out if that is true.

In the teaching it says that from the moment you get up in the morning till you go to bed at night you look at the thoughts that are arising. For a negative thought you have a pebble of a particular colour. For a positive thought you have a different coloured pebble. They do not have to be black and white as long as they are two different colours, one for good thoughts and one for bad thoughts. Whenever thoughts arise, you pick the pebble of the appropriate colour. Whenever you do good actions, you take that coloured pebble; likewise for bad actions. Before you go to bed, you calculate which colour you have more of. When there are more "good" pebbles, then you are appreciative and grateful for your thoughts and actions that day and wish to do even better the next day. That is a kind of promise to yourself. If there are more "bad" pebbles than expected you do not punish yourself, but just wish to do better the next day.

This is a very simple way of training your mind, looking at good and bad with a simple two colour system. If you do that you do not need to ask any teachers how good you are, you will know very well yourself. You may cheat sometimes but that is not so bad. Perhaps something is half good and half bad, so you call it a positive. That may not be wise, but sometimes people do cheat. We are very good at cheating ourselves, because we want to be good people. You do not want people telling you how bad you are, or recognise yourself how bad you are. You always try to hide it.

Sometimes practitioners have two bags, each containing their different coloured pebbles and then an extra bag into which they place a white pebble for a good thought or action and a black pebble for a bad thought or action. If you have the intention to improve your life, it is a very good guide. It protects you from so many negative actions and it helps give strength to your mind-training. It lets you count your actions, your speech and your thoughts.

I am sure that in the beginning it is difficult to decide where to put the pebbles, but as you start to be more careful, you may be able to see more clearly. Think of why you are acting in a particular way. Analyse yourself, but not in picture form. When you look at yourself as a picture, you only see one side. You need to analyse yourself in more detail, to observe yourself. Imagine that you are somebody else like a friend. What would their view be of your actions? You consider what that other person would think when they look at your actions and motivations and the consequences of your actions. What effect will your actions have on other people? You have to take an overall look at yourself, then you will have a better understanding. I think you have as many thoughts as you have breaths, so you will not be able to count every thought. General thoughts are perhaps neither good nor bad, so it is the thoughts that can make a change to yourself or to others that you need to consider. It does not mean you have to count every single thought.

I hope you may find this a useful exercise. The whole idea is to find a way to be honest with yourself. It is a way to understand yourself, to ask, "What kind of person am I?" Once you have analysed yourself, you do not leave it there. You find out how to improve your life, and maybe then you will be much better at the end.

In talking about mind-training I am perhaps not talking of enlightenment just now, but in the future maybe. Just keep on improving yourself, by Your own efforts, training every day. It is more than just wishing for good thoughts today and praying for two or three minutes and then, no sooner have you prayed than you are committing bad actions. You have already forgotten your prayers that morning. That is not useful and is not fully training your mind. That is not bringing you benefit and, whatever training you do, it should have some proper benefit. It should have an end result.

Laughing and crying are international! I suppose sometimes happy people do cry, but sad crying and happy laughter, these things are international. Everybody recognises these things. If somebody beats you up, whoever it is, that is considered bad. Nobody says: "I am so happy you have beaten me today." So when you look on an international level there is something called good and bad. There are other things which are different in different countries, such as beliefs. For example, in your country perhaps you shake hands when you meet somebody; in another country perhaps they kiss cheeks or bow down. These are things which are thought of as a good thing locally, but maybe not on an international level.

What we are talking about is how to develop the positive in a way that everybody recognises. Good action means action through which nobody suffers; furthermore that action itself brings goodness: something good from beginning to end. This is what you try to develop. If it is something that is seen as good in one country but not another, then this has more to do with cultural tradition and is not necessarily good or bad. We need to look at those things which are clearly positive.

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