UNIT 1.12A   TWO KINDS OF THOUGHT

1.12A ⌘ TEXT *Middle Length Discourses 19*	1.12A ❀ PALI *Majjhima Nikāya 19*
Before my awakening,	*pubbeva me sambodhā*
when I was committed to awakening	*anabhisambuddhassa*
but still unawakened,	*bodhisattasseva sato*
it occurred to me:	*etadahosi –*
'Suppose I dwell having divided	*'yaṃnūnāhaṃ dvidhā katvā*
my thoughts into two classes.'	*dvidhā katvā vitakke vihareyyan 'ti.*
So I set on one side	*so kho ahaṃ yo cāyaṃ kāmavitakko*
thoughts of sensual desire,	*yo ca byāpādavitakko*
thoughts of ill will,	*yo ca vihiṃsāvitakko*
and thoughts of cruelty [*i.e., unhealthy thoughts*];	*– imaṃ ekaṃ bhāgamakāsiṃ;*
and I set on the other side	*yo cāyaṃ nekkhammavitakko*
thoughts of renunciation,	*yo ca abyāpādavitakko*
thoughts of non-ill will,	*yo ca avihiṃsāvitakko*
and thoughts of non-cruelty [*i.e., healthy thoughts*]	*– imaṃ dutiyaṃ bhāgamakāsiṃ.*
As I abided thus,	*tassa mayhaṃ evaṃ appamattassa*
diligent, ardent, and resolute,	*ātāpino pahitattassa viharato*
an unhealthy thought arose in me.	*uppajjati [akusala]-vitakko.*
I understood thus:	*so evaṃ pajānāmi –*
'This unhealthy thought has arisen in me.	*'uppanno kho me ayaṃ [akusala]-vitakko.*
This leads to my own affliction,	*so ca kho attabyābādhāyapi saṃvattati,*
to the affliction of others,	*parabyābādhāyapi saṃvattati,*
and to the affliction of both;	*ubhayabyābādhāyapi saṃvattati,*
it obstructs wisdom, causes difficulties,	*paññānirodhiko vighātapakkhiko*
and leads away from *nibbāna*.'	*anibbānasaṃvattaniko' ti.*
When I considered...[*in this way*]	*'...' tipi me, paṭisañcikkhato*
it subsided in me.	*abbhatthaṃ gacchati;*
Whenever an unhealthy thought	*so kho ahaṃ uppannuppannaṃ*
arose in me,	*[akusala]-vitakkaṃ*
I abandoned it, removed it,	*pajahameva vinodameva*
did away with it.	*byantameva naṃ akāsiṃ.*
And as I abided thus,	*tassa mayhaṃ evaṃ appamattassa*
diligent, ardent, and resolute,	*ātāpino pahitattassa viharato*
a healthy thought arose in me.	*uppajjati [kusala]-vitakko.*

I understood thus: 'This healthy thought has arisen in me. This does not lead to my own affliction, to the affliction of others, and to the affliction of both; it aids wisdom, does not cause difficulties, and leads to *nibbāna*. If I think and ponder upon this thought even for a night, even for a day, even for a night and a day, I see nothing to fear from it.'	*so evaṃ pajānāmi –* *'uppanno kho me ayaṃ [kusala]-vitakko.* *so ca kho nevattabyābādhāya saṃvattati,* *na parabyābādhāya saṃvattati,* *na ubhayabyābādhāya saṃvattati,* *paññāvuddhiko avighātapakkhiko* *nibbānasaṃvattaniko'.* *rattiṃ cepi naṃ... divasaṃ cepi naṃ...* *rattindivaṃ cepi naṃ...* *anuvitakkeyyaṃ anuvicāreyyaṃ,* *neva tatonidānaṃ bhayaṃ samanupassāmi.*

1.12A ❖ COMMENT

A. Some people see this text and are concerned that the Buddha is setting up some sort of arbitrary ethical judgment that praises some things a blames others, which seems unnaturally 'dualist'. I read it rather as a practical tool for self-development, wherein one is encouraged to trust one's own empirical experience for understanding intuitively what is helpful to the project of transformation and what is unhelpful.

B. Here we have another functional definition of 'healthy' and 'unhealthy': whether or not something leads to affliction, obstructs wisdom, causes difficulties, or inclines away from *nibbāna*. Notice that the factor which makes the difference here is one's level of understanding. It is wisdom that gives us the power to let go of what is unhealthy and cultivate what is healthy.

C. What is said here about 'thoughts' is actually referring not to the cognitive content of the thought as much as to the emotional quality associated with and co-arising alongside the thought. The cognitive content of each mind moment is organized around thoughts (*vitakka*) as a function of the aggregate of perception (*saññā*), while the emotional response which accompanies each thought, or in the absence of thought with the perceptual interpretation of each sense object, is a function of the aggregate of formations (*sankhāra*). For example, the content of the thought 'lunch' is entirely neutral, while its ethical role in experience will be defined with whether it is thought with greediness, disgust, or equanimity.

1.12A ♦ LANGUAGE

A. We are used to translating the word '*bodhisatta*' only one way, as an 'awakening being' or a 'being yet-to-be awakened'. The word '*bodhi*' does indeed mean 'awakening', but the '*-satta*' added to it could be equivalent to the Sanskrit word '*sattva*' (being) or '*sakta*' (intent upon, committed to). The word gets a very technical meaning in later Buddhist usage, of course, as a powerful being superior to an *arahant* (an awakened one, lit. 'a worthy one') but not quite a Buddha, but in the early texts this idea has not yet developed. It is likely, then, that in this context we have something more like a person who is intent upon the goal of awakening, but has not yet attained it.

B. The word for 'thoughts' here is '*vitakka*', which we translate in the plural even though it is singular in the text because the Buddha is clearly talking about the thinking process in general. Thoughts arise (*uppajjati*) in the mind and then either subside (*abbhatthaṃ gacchati* = lit. 'go to conclusion') or are reinforced by 'pondering' (*vicāra*; as in the *anuvicāreyyaṃ* in the penultimate line). The point of this text is that while we may have no choice about what arises in the mind, we do have the to option to either let it go or reinforce it. When we understand it is harmful, we let it pass through without passing into action; when we understanding it is helpful, we nurture it with our attention.

1.12A ★ INVESTIGATION

A. The Buddha seems to suggest here that if we were to understand that a particular thought we might have would 'cause difficulties' and the rest, we would abandon it and it would naturally subside. Is this the case? Isn't it true that we know many of our most cherished thoughts to be harmful, but we cannot help but relish them anyway? I suggest the Buddha is referring here to a deeper understanding than we are used to working with. To 'know' something is harmful generally or conceptually is different than to 'deeply know' the harmfulness of something. See if you can explore these different levels of knowing as they manifest in your own experience. We are being invited to 'fully understand the nature of things', rather than merely 'know things to be true'.

B. Try breaking down each of the phrases in this text and investigating them individually. What thoughts or emotions or behaviors do you notice in yourself that 'lead to your own affliction'? What things 'lead to the affliction of others'? What things 'lead to the affliction of both.? What sort of overlap is there between the answers you provide to each of these three questions?

1.12A ✪ PRACTICE

A. Many of you might be familiar with the 'noting' practice often taught by students of Mahāsi Sayadaw, wherein one gently labels one's thoughts or experiences as 'thinking', or 'judging', or 'remembering', or some such similar tag. The goal is not to come up with a detailed taxonomy of experience, but to give oneself a nudge toward objectifying the experience and hence to regarding it with mindfulness rather than being caught up in or identified with it. In a similar vein, see if you can use the two simple labels suggested here by the Buddha; 'healthy' and 'unhealthy'. This is to be done not as a conceptual ethical classification, but as a subtle, intuitive, understanding of whether our experience each moment is 'helpful' or 'unhelpful' to the agenda of transforming oneself for the better.

B. See if you can zoom in and make a practice of looking in your own experience for those thoughts, states, and traits that 'obstruct wisdom' and those that 'aid wisdom'. How are we even going to recognize these? This involves making of wisdom itself an investigation and a practice. Generally speaking, we can think of wisdom as seeing things clearly as they actually are. What practices help us do this (tranquil meditation, perhaps?), and what obstructs this enhanced clarity of mind from happening (restless mental agitation, perhaps?)?