

<p>1.12B ☸ TEXT <i>Middle Length Discourses 19</i></p> <p>Whatever a person frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of their mind.</p> <p>If one frequently thinks and ponders upon unhealthy thoughts, one has abandoned healthy thoughts to cultivate the unhealthy thought, and then one’s mind inclines to unhealthy thoughts.</p> <p>If one frequently thinks and ponders upon healthy thoughts, one has abandoned unhealthy thoughts to cultivate the healthy thought, and then one’s mind inclines to healthy thoughts.</p>	<p>1.12B ☸ PALI <i>Majjhima Nikāya 19</i></p> <p><i>yaññadeva bhikkhu bahulamanuvitakketi anuvicāreti, tathā tathā nati hoti cetaso.</i></p> <p><i>[akusala]-vitakkaṃ ce bhikkhu bahulamanuvitakketi anuvicāreti, pahāsi [kusala]-vitakkaṃ, [akusala]-vitakkaṃ bahulamakāsi, tassa taṃ [akusala]-vitakkāya cittaṃ namati.</i></p> <p><i>[kusala]-vitakkaṃ ce bhikkhu bahulamanuvitakketi anuvicāreti, pahāsi [akusala]-vitakkaṃ, [kusala]-vitakkaṃ bahulamakāsi, tassa taṃ [kusala]-vitakkāya cittaṃ namati.</i></p>
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<p>1.12B ❖ COMMENT</p> <p>A. Behind this text is the insight of Buddhist psychology that the mind constructs its world one mind moment at a time. Each moment a morsel of data taken in from one of the senses acts as a seed around which many coordinated mental processes crystalize: the object is cognized, a feeling tone is applied, a perceptual interpretation is drafted, and an emotional response is generated. In this moment all five aggregates (<i>khandha</i>) cooperate globally to create a moment of experience which, since it is an event rather than a thing, immediately passes away—to be followed by another and another to constitute the stream of consciousness we experience.</p> <p>B. According to this model there can be only one emotional response (<i>sankhāra</i>) at a time, and since (as we have just seen in UNIT 1.12A) these may be either healthy or unhealthy, it follows that every moment one is responding to what is happening in experience in either a healthy or an unhealthy way. This text makes two important observations about that.</p> <p>C. One point has to do with mutual exclusion. When you are responding in one way, the other way is being blocked out. One of the great benefits of loving-kindness, for example, is that when you are feeling kindly it is impossible for thoughts of ill-will or aversion to manifest. This works the other way around too, however, so that every moment you feel annoyed, for example, a mild form of hatred, you are not capable of feeling kindness. This fact of mutual exclusion raises the stakes considerably, and places great emphasis on the quality of mind at any given moment.</p> <p>D. The other point made here is that habits of mind are developed and reinforced through usage. What is enacted gets strengthened, while what is neglected atrophies. This is the science underlying the ‘four great efforts’ for cultivating what is healthy and neglecting what is unhealthy.</p>
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1.12B ◆ LANGUAGE

A. The word used in this text for ‘inclines’ and ‘inclination’ is not the ‘*samvattati*’ (leads to, lit. ‘turns toward’) that we have seen many times before, but is rather based on the verb ‘*namati*’ and a related form ‘*nati*’. This comes from a root (*√nam*) meaning ‘to bend’, and I think this stronger form of the idea is significant. The mind (and probably the brain too in quite a literal way) is ‘bent’ or shaped or molded by what we think and do with it. We become what we do by doing it, and do what we do because of what we have become. This I think is the core idea behind *kamma* (Skt. *karma*), which accounts for the causes and effects of our actions.

B. We will recognize the two words used for thinking (*anuvitakketi*) and pondering (*anuvicāreti*), which are verbal forms of the *vitakka* and *vicāra* that came up in Unit 12a. This is the deliberate or intentional thinking we do by placing our attention on a particular object (*vitakka*) and then holding it there for some duration of time (*vicāra*). When we do this frequently (*bahula* = ‘a lot’), it strengthens a particular mental factor, just as doing something ‘a lot’ with a particular muscle of the body will strengthen it. Compare the expression, ‘neurons that fire together, wire together’.

1.12B ★ INVESTIGATION

A. The binary nature of this model suggest that there are two ways of coming to healthier mind states. One is to deliberately strengthen qualities like generosity, kindness, and insight; the other is to abandon states such as greed, hatred, and delusion. See which one of these you are most inclined toward, or which approach works better in which circumstances.

B. Explore this relationship between the two kinds of thought in your own experience. Is it the case that when you are giving attention to one of them the other is not happening? Is there a middle, neutral, state that does not seem to fall into either camp? Sometimes what seems neutral will resolve itself into subtly healthy or subtly unhealthy upon closer scrutiny.

C. See if you can observe this ‘inclination of the mind’ toward what it is most familiar with, as it is happening. See if you can feel this shift in any way through practice.

1.12B ✪ PRACTICE

A. It is a practice in itself just becoming aware of the quality of one’s thoughts, let alone trying to change them in any way. These two texts (12A & 12B) are inviting us to engage in a three-step process: 1) to see what is happening in our own experience, 2) to understand whether it is helpful or unhelpful toward the outcome of our own happiness and the well-being of others, and 3) to encourage us to take action to shape who we are and who we become.

B. See if you can develop the inclination to what is healthy by abandoning unhealthy thoughts and/or cultivating healthy thoughts. In other words, takes steps to develop a ‘friendship with what is healthy’ (as recommended in UNIT 1.9B).