

Food for the Thinking Mind

By K, Sri Dhammananda; Buddhist Missionary Society, Malaysia; 1999. 478 pages.

Apwekke Punyasiri

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"Food for the Thinking Mind" is an well-organized collection of quotations from various sources for light reading and handy reference. The compiler, Venerable Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda is a household name in the Buddhist world. As he is one of the prolific writers of Buddhism, his books are well known among the Buddhists across the globe. The present volume is different and enables us to share the wonderful thoughts of some of the great thinkers. Among them are founders of great religions, philosophers, scientists, psychologists, poets, and wise sages of humanity as a whole, such as Gautama Buddha, Socrates, Albert Einstein, Bertram Russell, Shakespeare, Napoleon, and Mahatma Gandhi. They have wielded an enormous influence on human civilization. Therefore, it is worthwhile examining how these great people view the world and human existence. The compiler himself must have

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been inspired by the great thoughts that he has included in this volume

The book consists of twenty chapters each with an introduction. Quotations deal with twenty subjects, such as "Nature of the Mind", "Life is Valuable", "Speech must be Guided", "How to act Wisely" "How to lead a Married and Family Life." One can start reading the book with whatever subject one is interested in. Each quotation is given a sub-heading and is indexed for easy reference. The introduction at the beginning of each chapter consists of a general discussion highlighting the compiler's own views on the subject. In a way, the compiler plays the role of an experienced steward, serving dishes cooked by different chefs. He has his own dishes. Wherever source of a quotation is not given, the author is the compiler himself.

As stated in the foreword, the purpose of compiling the book is to provide an insight into human life and thereby make one's life more meaningful: "The insights to understand life's imponderables cannot be obtained at one attempt. One has to constantly strive to reach that understanding by returning to the problem over and over again until wisdom arises. Like food we need it constantly to sustain ourselves." It is in that sense that this volume becomes 'food for the thinking mind'. It caters to the spiritual hunger of the reader.

The book is not aimed at a particular group of readers or religious followers. A single saying can be so meaningful and enlightening that it may change the whole process of thinking of an individual. As an entry from of the Buddha emphasizes,

"Though a thousand be the verses,  
With words of no avail,  
Better is a single line of verse,  
Having heard which, one is pacified".  
Dhammapada; VIII. 2.

Here is a sample of the sayings included in this volume:

"The journey of a thousand miles starts with one step"-Confucius, (p.212)

"Marriage is a give and take affair. The husband gives his wife everything he makes and she takes it" -Henry Morgan, (P.312)

"An ounce of practice is worth more than a ton of theory"-E.F. Schumacher, (p.197)

"Laugh, and the world laughs with you. Weep and you weep alone"-Shakespeare (p.207)