

The Talks of Eknath Easwaran : Tape 22

Study Guide for Meditation and the Mantram

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Instructions in Meditation from the Gita

Introduction

This month's tape includes two talks in which Sri Easwaran reviews the core disciplines in his Eight Point Program: meditation and the repetition of a mantram. In our exercises we will use this occasion to examine our practice afresh and look for ways to sharpen our skills.

The first talk is a commentary on the sixth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, which contains Sri Krishna's instructions in meditation. Easwaran concentrates on two of the verses from which he drew the basic elements of his mode of meditation.

The practical and the lofty are always inseparable for Easwaran. As he focuses on the details of time, place, and posture, he also provides glimpses into the supreme purpose of meditation – to rise above ordinary consciousness and become aware of the divine ground of our existence:

“The sages of ancient India discovered thousands of years ago that in the very depths of our consciousness there is a divine spark that is infinite and immortal. It is in trying to discover this divinity at the core of our personality that the human being rises to the greatest heights physically, mentally, intellectually, and of course spiritually.”

Practical Exercise

After watching this talk, please review the various aspects of your daily meditation practice and find one which needs some work. Once you've identified the weakness, develop a simple, manageable strategy to remedy it. To help you, here is a checklist of the basic elements of Sri Easwaran's mode of meditation, along with some typical weaknesses and possible remedies.

Meditation schedule: Are you consistent in the time of day when you meditate? Do you sit down for meditation soon after getting up in the morning, or do you get distracted by other pursuits? To remedy this, gently nudge your practice in the direction of a consistent morning time. Start meditating within 30 minutes of arising from sleep.

Duration: Do you always meditate for a full 30 minutes? If not, try during the coming week to give it a greater effort. If you get restless or sleepy and are tempted to stop, stand up briefly or take a short walk repeating the mantram, then sit down and complete the 30 minutes. If necessary, you could set a timer for 30 minutes and resolve not to get up until the timer goes off.

Posture: Do you maintain an upright posture for the full period of meditation? If you have difficulties doing this, you might benefit from the section on the nilgiri.org Web site, entitled “Posture in Meditation.”

Seating arrangement: Do you find sleep or physical discomfort a persistent distraction? If so, experiment this week with a different seating arrangement. Use an extra pillow as lower back support to keep your spine erect. Do some gentle stretching before you begin. Take a few

moments to find a comfortable, alert position at the outset, and check your posture once or twice as you meditate.

Passage: Is your repertoire of inspirational passages broad enough? Have your passages become so familiar that you repeat them mechanically? Set aside a full hour at some time during the week, go to a pleasant, quiet place, and memorize part or all of a new passage.

Distractions: Do you have specific repetitive distractions? Take five minutes outside of meditation (just a short period, no need to take more time) to reflect on the connection between these distractions and the way you think and act during the day. How might you use the allied disciplines to start diminishing this distracting force in your mind?

Suggested Passage for Meditation

In addition to the work you do this week on the details of your meditation practice, choose a passage from *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* that describes the essence of meditation to you – your ideal. Read it frequently this week, and start memorizing it.

Recommended Reading

The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living, Volume One, Chapter Six.

Instructions in Meditation from the Gita

Transcript

October 15, 1988

The sages of ancient India discovered thousands of years ago that in the very depths of our consciousness there is a divine spark that is infinite and immortal. It is in trying to discover this divinity at the core of our personality that the human being rises to the greatest heights physically, mentally, intellectually, and of course spiritually. In all the major religions, we have very demanding difficult disciplines that, when practiced sincerely and systematically under the guidance of an illumined teacher, can enable every one of us to make this supreme discovery. According to the Hindu and Buddhist tradition, this can be accomplished only when the mind is made still. When the mind is made still, self-will is extinguished. When self-will is extinguished, all separateness is gone, and we discover that we are at one with all life.

This is not an intellectual discovery or even an empirical discovery. It transforms your character, conduct, and consciousness. The world does not change. Your perception of the world changes, and it brings in its wake enormous resources, so that Mahatma Gandhi will say, on the basis of his personal experience, that even one person making this supreme discovery can shake the world gently.

The first step is to learn how to meditate, about which there is so much misunderstanding – not only in secular circles but in religious circles, in every country. Let us be very clear about what meditation is.

The Gita says, [*Tatraikagram manah kritva yatahchittendriyakriyah upavishyasane yunjyad yogam atmavishuddhaye.*](#) First word, *tatraikagram manah kritva*. The purpose of meditation is to make the mind one-pointed, from which will come unchanging love (because the mind cannot have too many points), unchanging loyalty to the highest ideal. All this is implied in the training of the mind to be one-pointed. I have seen many good people, young as well as old, forced to disrupt loving relationships from what they think are defects of character or pressure of circumstances. In the light of the Gita, it is all because the mind has not been trained to be one-pointed. Not only in personal relationships, but in devotion to the highest ideal, this training of the mind to be one-pointed is meditation.

Yatachittendriyakriyah. In order to keep the mind one-pointed, the senses have to be trained. The more the senses are trained, the more one-pointed the mind will be. The more one-pointed the mind will be, the greater the depth of meditation. The greater the depth of meditation, the nearer to the Atman we are.

So, please devote half an hour to the practice of meditation every day without fail. Have a room, if you can; if not, have a corner. Keep it simple. Keep it austere. And whether it is a room or a corner, it will come to have lasting associations. The best time for meditation is early morning, the earlier the better, but this has to be taken in accordance with one's personal requirements. When you go to your meditation room or meditation corner, wear loose clothes, particularly at the waist, and sit down in a comfortable position, whether it is in a chair with arms or on the carpet. As Patanjali would say, that position is best where you are most comfortable and least aware of the body. But I would suggest that you don't make the body too comfortable or too warm, because then sleep may set in.

In the Upanishads, we have the best definition of a place fit for meditation. It should be clean; it should be cool; it should be calm: the three Cs. You can't improve on that.

Memorize an inspirational passage – the prayer of Francis of Assisi is ideal for that purpose, but I suggest we learn by heart the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, the last 18 verses; the twelfth chapter of the Gita, the first chapter of the Dhammapada; St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians 13; the Psalm of David -- the 23rd Psalm (The Lord is my shepherd). Keep on memorizing inspirational passages. I still do them. That is the best way to cultivate your memory, to give it plenty of exercise. It is a great joy for me, even when Sumner is giving me a massage, to go through all these verses. They bring so much joy. They elevate consciousness to such an extent that you will be listening to a kind of divine symphony inside.

Having memorized the Prayer of Francis and other inspirational passages, sit down comfortably, close your eyes gently and go through the words of the prayer. Lord . . . make me . . . an instrument . . . of . . . thy peace. It is always good to remind oneself that we are not addressing somebody outside. We are not directing our prayer to some extraterritorial being out in another galaxy. It is very important to remind ourselves of that. Then it is the answer to your prayer comes from inside. Most of the controversy about the nature of God and the existence of God can be banished if we will just remind ourselves that God is nearer to me than all of you. He is nearer to me than this body. He is closer to me than my jugular vein, as the Sufis say, and he is dearer to me than my very life.

It is because of the Lord being in my heart that my lungs breathe, that my heart beats, that my eyes see, that my ears hear, that my tongue speaks, that my legs walk. We have to remind ourselves of this when we use the prayer. And “Make me an instrument of thy peace” means that wherever we are, we give rather than receive. Wherever we are, we work for others without any desire for profit or pleasure. The Gita will say, [*bhramany adhaya karmani sangam tyaktva karoti yah lipyate na sa papena padma patram ivambhasa*](#). Such a person who works without any desire for profit or prestige, for the welfare of others, he becomes like a lotus attracting bees from all to enjoy the honey that the lotus contains.

At the end of the first two or three lines, distractions will start coming in, particularly for beginners. The Gita will quietly say, [*manas chanchalam asthiram*](#). Don't get upset. Don't get annoyed. That is the nature of the mind. *Chanchala* – *chala*, to move. It has got to keep moving from thought to thought, from desire to desire, from feeling to feeling, from memory to memory. That is the nature of the mind. When distractions come, don't resist them. That is what people do all the time in daily living. The more you dwell on a distraction, the stronger it becomes. The more you resist a distraction, the greater its force. The principal is subtle, but it is very simple. I didn't learn it very easily, but when I have some unpleasant incidents to watch or unpleasant memories come back, all that I do is turn my attention more to the inspirational passage.

Whenever the mind wanders away to some unhappy incident, some unpleasant memory, you can train the mind to come back to the inspirational passage. It is almost like training a dog. It can be done to perfection. There is no need for us to get obstreperous about our mind wandering if we keep on bringing the mind back to the inspirational passage. Not only during meditation, even while listening to people. How many people, if you watch their eyes, will let their thoughts wander while listening. It comes through very keen observation that you can almost see whose thoughts are wondering, whose mind is wandering. It is because of lack of training, and this training is the very basis of the mode of meditation I present. It calls for a great deal of patience and a great deal of perseverance to bring it back every time it wanders.

The great day will come when it will not wander at all. Then you will not have any distractions. When you are attending a play, you will put one hundred percent attention on that. When you are with your boyfriend or girlfriend, you will give him or her one hundred percent attention. My understanding is that without this kind of one-pointed attention, romantic relationships are just in name. You will always be able, at all times – when life is hard with you, when circumstances work against you, when even your boyfriend or girlfriend is disagreeable – it won't affect your love because it won't affect your concentration. Anger, from an engineer's point of view, is very destructive. It is the apotheosis of distraction. When you are able to have complete control over your attention, when your mind is one-pointed all the time, even at mealtime, you will enjoy your meal very much; at the movie, you will enjoy it very much; at a concert, you will enjoy it very much. Your mind will always be one-pointed and that is why the Buddha says, “When you are running, run. When you are walking, walk. When you are sitting, sit. Don't wobble.” Our modern civilization is all wobble, which explains why relationships are so short-lived and people, in spite of all their affluence, are so insecure. That is the value of the one-pointed mind.

For most people, particularly in the early days, it is double tracked. On the one hand, you will be listening to the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. On the other hand, you will be listening to some rock-and-roll music or, if you like, heavy metal. There is a time for heavy metal – then you will listen to heavy metal, if that is your inclination – but not during meditation. Even light metal I wouldn't recommend.

When you have this double track going on, if you try to resist, it will get louder and louder. The answer is again to give more and more concentration to the second chapter of the Gita, to the first chapter of the Dhammapada, to the Invocations of Ansari of Herat. To show you how advanced this skill can become, I had a very sad message about one of my cousins who is very dear to me, and actually when I sat down in meditation, my first prayer was not just for her recovery, but that she will find a better context next time to be closer to me. After that, I dropped the subject, which is an extraordinary thing to say, because she is very dear to me. That is what we can learn to do. All of us are going to have bereavements. All of us are going to see death in our own life, of our dear ones. It is not lack of sensitiveness, but you have now such sovereignty over your own mind and such faith in the future for the person who is undergoing this ordeal that it doesn't affect your meditation. Not only do you feel comforted, you are able to comfort others. If I may say so, there is only one person who can comfort you in the last resort – yourself. Nobody else can.

Now follows the problem of sleep, which affects everybody, even after years. As soon as you find that your concentration is improving, that your nervous system is beginning to relax, sit up. Don't wait for the slumber party. As soon as you sit up, move away from back support, and if you sit like this [straightened up], you cannot fall asleep – unless you are extraordinary. Wherever I look around, I always find slackening of postures – very often, people not being aware of it at all. That is why, check your posture now and then to make sure that you are like this [straight]. Otherwise, this problem will continue to be with you for many, many years. Even after many years, when the time comes for you to change a level of consciousness, you just fall asleep. It is missing the opportunity of a lifetime.

In the morning, particularly, if you feel that a cup of coffee helps you to be awake or a cup of tea helps you to be awake, I would suggest that it is much better to have a cup than to fall asleep. Today (this is a literary aside), I learned with great delight that decaf was first introduced into England by Bernard Shaw's wife,

Charlotte, from a process that was slowly being developed in Germany. I feel very happy that I owe decaf espresso to Bernard Shaw.

After you have gone through the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, it is much better to keep on adding to your repertoire than using the same prayer over and over again because it may have a tendency to become mechanical. That is why, keep on adding. Change your inspirational passages now and then and don't let them get stale at all. That is one reason the mind falls asleep. Give the mind something fresh, and our book. *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* is full of inspirational passages.

There are a few physical problems, minor ones, that need to be taken into account. Some people may find it hard to swallow when concentration improves. For such people, just keep a glass of water and give less attention to the swallowing process and more to the prayer of Francis. It can be very uncomfortable thinking, "I can't swallow. I can't swallow." It will be "Lord, make me swallow." Finally, your attention goes to that. That is why: give a little less attention on the swallowing process, and more attention on the second chapter of the Gita, and a little physical help, a sip of water. Interestingly enough, if you know there is a glass of water close by, I can tell you from my knowledge of the mind that the mind may not make it difficult for you to swallow.

Your posture may turn. It is when you are very concentrated, you may be like this or you may be like that. That is why, check your posture once or twice during the half hour to make sure that it is upright. *Samam kayashirogrivam*. *Kaya*, body. *Shira*, head. *Grivam*, neck. That's Krishna's instructions. [Samam kayashirogrivam dharayann achalam sthirah](#). When I repeat that line, my body will almost turn into a statue. Because of my passion for Krishna, my devotion for him, my great desire to carry out his instructions – *samam kayashirogrivam* – they must be in one straight line. *Dharayann*, holding yourself up. *Achalam*, motionless. *Sthirah*, like a mountain. It is not just physical motionlessness only. The body becomes completely motionless and the mind becomes completely motionless. Then you are not looking at a human being; you are looking at a mountain like the Himalayas, as Gandhi can be called. *Samam kayashirogrivam dharayann achalam sthirah*. Those lines need to be followed accurately.

As your meditation deepens more and more, [prashantamanasam hy enam yoginam sukham uttamam upaiti shanta rajasam brahma bhutam akalmasham](#). Wonderful lines. There will be such profound peace in your heart that it will convey itself to those who are around you. Just as when you are very easily agitated, it can convey itself very easily to those around you. Here: *prashantamanasam*. *Shanta* is peace. *Prashanta*, profound peace. *Hyenam yoginam*, who is immersed in meditation. *Sukham*, the highest health. *Sukham*, the highest happiness. *Upaiti*, it comes to you. You don't go looking after health. The highest health comes and says, "I want to be with you." The highest joy comes and says, "I want to be with you." According to the great sages of ancient India, you cannot capture joy. It comes to you. The highest health – physical, mental, intellectual, spiritual – comes to you. That's why I talk about Kabir living 120 years. There is no agitation in the mind. The nervous system is not affected by any circumstances. You need only a few hours of sleep. The rest of the night you can repeat your mantram. You can go through your inspirational passages, as I do, with great joy – almost like attending a symphony.

All of this brings untold benefit to your physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual life. In your relationships, you are always able to give. In your work, you are always able to give. In your life, you are

always able to give. *Prashantamanasam hy enam yoginam sukham uttamam upaiti shantarajasam*. There is a loveliness about your life, your face, your eyes, all reflecting the peace in the depths of consciousness. That is how real beauty comes, a beauty that cannot be touched by the passage of time. *Shantarajasam brahmabhutam akalmasham*. That person is in touch with the Divine Self. Whether it is Teresa or Francis or Mahatma Gandhi or the Buddha – they are holding hands with the Divine Self. When you hold their hand, you have to remember that they are holding the hand, so you are holding the hand of the divine by holding their hand. *Akalmasham*, evil cannot approach them because they will burn up evil. Sorrow cannot approach them because they will relieve sorrow. Impurity cannot approach them because they will make the impure pure.

On this note, I will conclude this introductory talk on meditation, which I think will be of benefit to all of us, including me.

A Remedy for Every Ill

Introduction

Along with meditation, the repetition of a mantram or holy name forms the core of Sri Easwaran's Eight Point Program. In this talk, a mystical verse from the Sanskrit tradition gives him an opportunity to explore how broad and deep this practice can go. The mantram, as a link to our deepest Self, "is the best remedy for any sickness, a light in the darkness, a bridge across difficulties, a protector against fears, a friend amidst troubles, and a boat to carry us across the deep sea of phenomenal existence."

Practical Exercise

At the conclusion of this talk, Easwaran touches on the topic of using the mantram to deal with fear. This week we will explore this deep topic with a simple exercise.

Worry is a common form of fearfulness with which we are all acquainted, so it provides a good place to start dealing with fear. Reflect for a few moments to identify a situation in your life that makes you worried. Take a blank book or sheet of paper and write your concern in a few words at the top of the page. Then, fill up the page below it by writing your mantram. Feel free to repeat this exercise as often as you like. Try to do it at least once a day for a week. Its purpose is to train us to apply the mantram to situations about which we usually worry, and so gain the capacity to act with detached concern. Repeating the mantram is a way of learning not to dwell so much on our fears, or on ourselves, but to direct our attention to the deeper part of our personality which has the spiritual resources to deal with the problem.

Suggested Passage for Meditation

Choose a passage from *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* that relates to the mantram. Read it frequently this week, and start memorizing it.

Recommended Reading

Continue reading from *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, Volume One, Chapter Six.

A Remedy for Every Ill

Transcript

Dec. 24, 1988

Today is the birthday of one of the great saints of India, called Sri Ramana Maharshi. He attained Self-realization at the age of sixteen and lived a very long, uneventful life completely united with the Lord of Love, whether you call him Christ, or Krishna, or Shiva, or Allah, or the Divine Mother.

While it is not possible for us to attain illumination at the age of sixteen, I don't think it is impossible for anyone who has the determination, the dedication, and the devotion to become aware of God during this life. All that we have to do is to bring into unified focus all our desires, all our passions, which is not negating life but which is affirming life. Which is not withdrawing from life, but which is almost rising above life.

No one has given the secret more directly than Jesus the Christ. "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. The second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." I would say, "as thy Self."

What the practice of meditation, supported by the allied disciplines, enables us to do is to carry out these commandments of Jesus while living with our family, holding a useful job, contributing to society, and never forgetting God, not only while awake but even while asleep. Even though I come from a very ancient Hindu family, I don't think I would have even understood all of this when I was functioning successfully at my university in Central India. Intellectually, I might have perhaps been intrigued, but I don't think it would have even come within my orbit of comprehension, much less of attainment, until I began to practice meditation and the disciplines that go with it in the midst of a very busy life, in the midst of a very fruitful career.

One of the greatest mystics in India – one of the greatest mystics in the whole world – called Shankara, who lived in our state of Kerala during the eighth Century A.D., he too was one of those spiritual prodigies who attained illumination very early in life. He has a very pithy saying, which took me many years to understand. "All suffering comes from forgetfulness of God." We hear it all the time in Kerala, but it was only after many, many years of meditation and reflection that I began to see that he is not exaggerating at all.

As you know, I am a great admirer of science. I try as far as possible to keep in touch with all the advances in science, and it is from them that I am beginning to learn how comprehensive Shankara was. In our ancient scriptures it is said that sorrow comes to us from three sources – sorrow or suffering or sickness, it's called *tapah, tapatraya*. *Traya* B three. One is from other people, which is always easy for everybody to understand. As soon as I make that statement that suffering comes from other people, there is a general nod of agreement from all over the audience. That's how Shankara starts. Then he will say, amazingly, from the environment. There, too, we are prepared to admit now. But when Shankara says, "mostly from yourself" – "Oh no, Oh no." That's the general smile of skepticism also that I hear.

Let me quote a very easy verse – some people have just come from Sanskrit class, so they will be able to follow it very easily.

[Rujasu nathah paramam hi beshajam tamah pradipo vishameshu samkramah
Bhayeshu raksha vyasaneshu bandhavo bhavaty agadhe vishayambhasi plavah.](#)

This is not philosophy nor is it even theology. It is practical counseling where health is concerned, where happiness is concerned, where loving relationships are concerned, where creative work is concerned. Every word is precious in its applicability. *Natha*: one of the great names of the Lord is *nathah*, who is our boss. I always refer to God as my Beloved Boss. *Rujasu* – when we are ill – and it includes not just emotional agitation, physical illness, physical ailments – *rujasu*, suffering that is inflicted on the body or the mind, is *ruja*. *Paramam hi beshajam* – *beshaja*, drug. *Paramam*, you would probably call it super drug. *Parama* is that.

I too used to think, "Oh, these people are very poetic," but I know from many, many years of use now that this is not poetry. This is pharmacology. My witness is Gandhiji, who says that the holy name *Rama* has become the staff of his life. I think it is a very appropriate Christmas gift for all of us from all the great mystics of the world – the power of the holy name. Just as $e=mc^2$ has enormous power to split the atom, similarly the name of *Jesus*, the holy mantram *Ave Maria*, the Buddha's *Om mani padme hum*, the Islamic *Allahu akbar*, the Jewish *Barukh attah Adonai* — all these are packed with power.

Meditation, as you know, calls for enormous discipline, but everybody can use the mantram. It is my ambition gradually, with the help of many, many people, to have every child in this country learn to use the mantram in childhood. Just as we give them inoculations to protect against all kinds of illness, which I appreciate, the use of the mantram can protect every child against so much suffering, against so much sickness. When you go to the dentist, when you go for an injection, when you have to go for your finals, when you have a headache – I am talking about children – men, women, children can all learn to repeat the mantram.

In India, parrots are taught to repeat the mantram. There are parrots where, if you enter a home, they will say "Rama, Rama." I used to ask my students at Cal, "If a parrot can say Rama, Rama, you people – sophomores, graduate students – you certainly can say Rama, Rama." But, how to say it is now the question. Whatever weight my words carry is because of my own personal experience. For many, many years I have been using my mantram. When I am going to the city, I don't say a word in the car. When I am traveling on a plane, I don't say a word. When I am waiting in a restaurant, I use my mantram. When I go to a movie theater, when I am waiting, I say the mantram. Most of all, at night. You see, I used to have, as most children, many fears, many unpleasant dreams – which everybody has. When I started saying this thirty years ago – next year makes thirty years, a lot of people with sleeping problems were taking sleeping pills, which do have a place under the direction of an experienced physician. I am not questioning that at all, but the best tranquilizer, the best sedative for everyone – whatever your day has been, however troubled your day has been, whatever difficulties are in store for you on the following day – is to learn the simple skill of falling asleep in the mantram.

As the head of a great spiritual organization, I have all kinds of difficulties. I have all kinds of challenges every day. I don't take them to bed with me for the simple reason that I have mastered the art of repeating the name of Rama over a long, long period. Between the last waking moment and the first sleeping moment, there is a narrow tunnel through which you can shoot the mantram. The precision of aim and perfection of skill is such that I can almost . . . Bowling! Put my fingers into the mantram and aim it well, see the narrow tunnel and send it through and hear the strike. Everybody can learn to do that. It takes a lot of practice. Sometimes when you don't go to sleep for an hour, just keep repeating it. If you lie awake for three hours, you can look upon it as time gained for practicing this skill. Your whole attitude toward lack of sleep and insomnia changes.

Many people, as you know, are afraid that they won't go to sleep, and perhaps that fear itself may get in the way of sleep coming. So you change your outlook towards sleep. At night you can hear the mantram rolling across the fields of your mind, healing old wounds. There are many physical problems that come with that and many, many have been helped by this simple advice of learning to fall asleep in the mantram and getting up refreshed in body, mind, and spirit with all the gusto that you need for contributing to life.

Also, before you go to bed, please read a book of spiritual inspiration. Some of them are great literature. Prepare your mind with that and then repeat the mantram. And there is no reason why everybody should not be able to sleep, as Ramdas says, "in the arms of the Lord." That's what repetition of the mantram does.

When you are angry, when you are afraid, when you are greedy, when you are restless, you can use all those negative emotions as a hammer to send the mantram in. Go out for a long walk. Don't take it out on people. Don't take it out on yourself. Just go for a long walk repeating *Jesus, Jesus, Jesus* or *Rama, Rama, Rama* and you will notice gradually that the rhythm of the mantram combines with the rhythm of the footsteps to combine with the rhythm of your breathing, with which the rhythm of thinking is closely connected.

To give everybody added inspiration, keep as your goal what is called *ajapajapam*. The repetition of the mantram is called *japam*. *Japam* means "to repeat." Through many, many years of hard, persistent practice, I don't have to repeat it. It repeats itself – I can't stop it. That to me, of course, comes from the grace of my teacher, whose mantram I repeat. The miracle of it is that when the mantram begins to repeat itself, no negative thought can enter your mind. It is like going to the movie theater. At the entrance there will be the person with a red flashlight saying, "Let me see your ticket." Our mind is a movie theater where there is no usher. There is no ticket seller. There is only popcorn everywhere. Anybody can go and sit anywhere, eat anything. There is nobody.

The Buddha, the most practical of physicians, says there is nothing so hostile as an untrained mind, and there is nothing so friendly as a trained mind. In meditation, your mind becomes your friend. Your senses become your friend. Your body becomes your friend. This is why, for everyone, I would say start with the mantram – give it as your gift to your children, to your friend's children, to everybody. The word means: *man* means mind; *tra* means to protect.

Rujasu natha paramam hi beshajam tamah pradipo. *Tamah* means darkness. *Pradipa* means light. *Pra* means bright light. [Pointing at a TV light] Can't even look at that. See, often we are in the dark. We don't

know how to make choices. We don't even know that there are choices and I am one of those who are prepared to maintain that everybody always has choices. Shall I help myself or shall I help others? Shall I get this for myself or shall I give it to others? That choice is everywhere – rich, poor, wise, otherwise.

Pradipah. Whenever you have choices to make, decisions to make, meditation will clear the mind and fill it with light, so that you can be sure of making good decisions under all circumstances and you develop that marvelous quality all of us admire – grace under pressure. That's one of the surest tests of spiritual awareness – to see how a person acts under intense pressure. Just as a ship is tested in high waves, a really spiritual person is tested when he has to face criticism, when he meets with fierce opposition. These are the tests which you can apply to Gandhiji all his life: Most graceful under pressure; most beautiful with opponents; most at peace, not only with those who liked him but those who caused difficulties for him.

So, *tamah pradipo vishameshu samkramah*. I think, wasn't it Socrates who said “an unexamined life is not worth living”? I would say an easy life is not worth living. It is a terrible statement to make in modern times.

Gandhiji has a very private statement: He likes storms. It is when circumstances are difficult, when there is opposition, that we come to life. I think it is a British writer that said, "What would I do with these arms if something didn't stand in my way?" It is by pushing them that my muscles get stronger.

In Kerala, we have a private joke. High school boys will usually want to show the frog jumping on their muscles. We should have frogs jumping in our mind. What would happen is – that is one of the great secrets of spiritual life – as your muscles grow stronger, greater responsibilities will come to you. As your shoulders grow stronger, greater burdens will be placed on you. As my Granny used to say, "Not one pound more than you can bear and not one pound less than you can bear."

Third, *bhayeshu rakshah*. Compared to the affluent West, I think people are more afraid in the Third World. I notice that even with our kids, they are comparatively free from many of the fears I had. Gandhiji, as you know, he was afraid of ghosts. When he wanted to go out for a walk, in the early days of his marriage, in the dark, he used to invite his wife – not for romance, but for safety. I used to enjoy it very much! Here is someone I call the most courageous person the modern world has produced, who stood unarmed against the greatest empire the world has seen – he was so afraid he couldn't go out in the dark for a walk without his better half. We have all kinds of fears, you know: loss of money, loss of vitality, loss of youth, loss of hair. It extends on and on, but ultimately, in everybody's consciousness – I am quoting Carl Jung – there is the fear of death. In everybody, even though we don't think about it – even though we think it won't come to us – there is fear of death – our death, the death of our dear ones.

The Gita, in one tremendous verse – *Dehi nityam avadhyo 'yam dehe sarvasya bhārata. Tasmāt sarvāni bhūtāni na tvam śochitum arhasi*. The Lord says, in the form of Sri Krishna: (*deha* means body; *dehi* means the person who lives in the body, of whom we are not aware, of whom I was not aware) *deha*, this body, will be dissolved into its chemical constituents after some decades – not only mine but everybody's. There is that lurking awareness somewhere in the corner of consciousness, which is the cause of many untold fears. When you become aware of God, the clearest proof is *dehi nityam avadhyo 'yam dehe sarvasya bhārata*. You know the body is perishable, but you know that you are the imperishable spirit. With that, the fear of death goes. Even though the fear of death has left my mind, I think I am more eager

to live longer than most people who identify themselves with the body because, with the help of a large number of people, I want to share this awareness with all those who are prepared to stake everything on making this personal discovery.

Weekly Lesson Plan

Lesson One

This month our lessons will lead us through a review of the core disciplines in the Eight Point Program: meditation and the mantram.

The videotaped talk we'll watch this week is a commentary on these lines from the Bhagavad Gita. "Strive to still your thoughts. Make your mind one-pointed in the practice of meditation, and your heart will be purified. Hold your body, head, and neck firmly in a straight line, and keep your eyes from wandering."

For this week's lesson, we'll review some of the most important aspects of our daily meditation practice and reflect on how we might improve our practice in each area. Here is a checklist of the basic elements of Sri Easwaran's mode of meditation, along with some typical weaknesses and possible remedies. Read each one and reflect on what has helped you in the past to make progress in them, and what improvements you might make in the future.

Meditation schedule: Are you consistent in the time of day when you meditate? Do you sit down for meditation soon after getting up in the morning, or do you get distracted by other pursuits? To remedy this, gently nudge your practice in the direction of a consistent morning time. Start meditating within 30 minutes of arising from sleep.

Duration: Do you always meditate for a full 30 minutes? If not, try during the coming week to give it a greater effort. If you get restless or sleepy and are tempted to stop, stand up briefly or take a short walk repeating the mantram, then sit down and complete the 30 minutes. If necessary, you could set a timer for 30 minutes and resolve not to get up until the timer goes off.

Posture: Do you maintain an upright posture for the full period of meditation? If you have difficulties doing this, you might benefit from the section on the nilgiri.org Web site, entitled "Posture in Meditation."

Seating arrangement: Do you find sleep or physical discomfort a persistent distraction? If so, experiment this week with a different seating arrangement. Use an extra pillow as lower back support to keep your spine erect. Do some gentle stretching before you begin. Take a few moments to find a comfortable, alert position at the outset, and check your posture once or twice as you meditate.

When it's time for inspiration, watch the first talk on the tape, *Instructions in Meditation from the Gita*, which is 34 minutes long, or read from the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

Lesson Two

This week we are continuing our focus on meditation. As we did last week, we'll review some of the most important aspects of our daily meditation practice and reflect on how we might improve our practice in each area. Here are two of the basic elements of Sri Easwaran's mode of meditation, along some typical weaknesses that arise, and possible remedies. Read each one and reflect on what has helped you in the past to make progress in them, and what improvements you might make in the future.

Passage: Is your repertoire of inspirational passages broad enough? Have your passages become so familiar that you repeat them mechanically? Set aside a full hour at some time during the week, go to a pleasant quiet place, and memorize part or all of a new passage. If the group desires, one Satsang meeting may be devoted to a quiet period for memorizing passages.

Distractions: Do you have specific repetitive distractions? Take a few minutes (not during meditation!) to reflect on the connection between these distractions and the way you think and act during the day. How might you use the allied disciplines to start diminishing this distracting force in your mind? Don't dwell on the distractions themselves or spend too much time on this, but concentrate your attention on what would be beneficial.

When it's time for inspiration, read from Chapter 6 of *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

Lesson Three

This week our focus is the mantram, and we'll do a simple exercise to explore how the mantram can be used to reduce worry.

In the videotaped talk this week, a mystical verse from the Sanskrit tradition gives Easwaran an opportunity to explore how broad and deep the mantram can go. The mantram, as a link to our deepest Self, "is the best remedy for any sickness, a light in the darkness, a bridge across difficulties, a protector against fears, a friend amidst troubles, and a boat to carry us across the deep sea of phenomenal existence." At the conclusion of this talk, Easwaran touches on the topic of using the mantram to deal with fear.

Worry is a common form of fearfulness with which we are all acquainted, so it provides a good place to start dealing with fear. Reflect for a few moments to identify a situation in your life that makes you worried. Ask everyone in the group to write their concern at the top of a blank sheet. If anyone prefers, they can just use a few initials or some other cryptic way of writing down the worry. Then, in some way that's appropriate for the group, collect the sheets, shuffle them, and pass them out again so that everyone has someone else's sheet.

Don't ask or talk about the concerns listed on the sheets. Just write the mantram with as much concentration as possible. In this form, "mantram worrying" can teach us how to combine concern with

detachment. With practice we can start to relate to our own challenges with the same detachment we have about others' troubles. Repeating the mantram is a way of learning not to dwell so much on our fears, or on ourselves, but to direct our attention to the deeper, spiritual part of our personality, which has the spiritual resources to deal with the problem

If you are doing this exercise by yourself, take a blank book or a blank sheet of paper and write your concern in a few words at the top of the page. Then, fill up the page below it by writing your mantram. Feel free to repeat this exercise as often as you like. Try to do it at least once a day for a week. Its purpose is to train us to apply the mantram to situations about which we usually worry, and so gain the capacity to act with detached concern.

After completing the exercise take some time to reflect or discuss how you might use the mantram in a similar way with other difficult challenges, such as irritation or insecurity.

When it's time for inspiration, watch the second talk on this tape, *A Remedy for Every Ill*, which is 31 minutes long, or continue reading the sixth chapter of *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, Volume One. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

Lesson Four

This week we'll be repeating the exercise we did last week. This time, however, when identifying an issue about which to write the mantram, choose whatever challenge is most pressing for you right now.

Once again, take some time to reflect on how you might apply this technique in other contexts, using a mantram walk or silent repetition as well as writing.

When it's time for inspiration, continue reading the sixth chapter of *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, Volume One. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

Terms & References

ajapajapam The holy name (*mantram*) repeating itself in our consciousness without effort on our part.

Atman The Self, the seed of perfection hidden within all creatures.

japam Repetition of a spiritual formula or holy name (*mantram*).

Jung, Carl (1875-1961) Swiss psychiatrist, one of the founding fathers of modern depth psychology.

Kabir Medieval Indian mystic and poet, who is said to have lived 120 years.

Kerala The South Indian state where Sri Easwaran was born and raised.

Patanjali Ancient Indian teacher of meditation. Author of the *Yoga Sutras*.

Ramdas Swami Ramdas (1884-1963). Modern Indian mystic.

Sufis Islamic mystics.

Verses referred to in this talk:

From the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter Six:

Verse 12

tatraikagram manah kritva yatachittendriyakriyah upavishyasane yunjyad yogam atmavishuddhaye

Having taken your seat, strive to still your thoughts. Make your mind one-pointed in the practice of meditation, and your heart will be purified.

Verse 10

bhramany adhaya karmani sangam tyaktva karoti yah lipyate na sa papena padma patram ivambhasa

Those who have surrendered all selfish attachments in work to the Lord are like the leaf of a lotus floating clean and dry in water. Sin cannot touch them.

Verse 26

Yato yato nishcharati manashchanchalam asthiram tatastato niyamyaitad atmany eva vasham nayet

It is the nature of the mind to be restless and diffuse, always seeking satisfaction without. Lead it within; train it to rest in the Self.

Verse 13

samam kayashirogrivam dharayann achalam sthirah

Hold your body, head, and neck firmly in a straight line.

Verse 27

prashantamanasam hy enam yoginam sukham uttamam upaiti shanta rajasam brahma bhutam akalmasham

Abiding joy comes to those who still the mind and senses, who free themselves from the taint of self-will and unify their consciousness in the Lord.

Verse 30

Dehi nityam avadhyo 'yam dehe sarvasya bharata. Tasmāt sarvani bhutani na tvam shochitum arhasi.

The Self of all beings, living within the body, is eternal and cannot be harmed. Therefore, you should not grieve.

The following is a traditional verse (not from the Gita):

*Rujasu nathah paramam hi bhashajam tamah pradipo vishameshu samkramah
Bhayeshu raksha vyasaneshu bandhavo bhavaty agadhe vishayambhasi plavah.*

The Lord is the best remedy for any sickness, a light in the darkness, a bridge across difficulties, a protector against fears, a friend amidst troubles, and a boat to carry us across the deep sea of phenomenal existence.

rujasu – in sickness

nathah – the Lord

paramam – the highest, best

hi – indeed

bhashajam – remedy, drug

tamah – out of darkness

pradipo – a bright light, beacon

vishameshu – in difficulties

samkramah – a bridge, crossing

bhayeshu – in fears
raksha – protection
vyasaneshu – in pains, in troubles
bandhavo – a friend
bhavaty – He is
agadhe – in the deep
vishayambhasi – in the ocean of material phenomena
plavah -- a boat

How to Use This Course

This video is part of an ongoing monthly series in the teachings of Sri Eknath Easwaran. The talks on this tape, like all of Sri Easwaran's talks, are rich and deep in content. They shed light on many aspects of life, but their true value emerges as we try to apply their teachings in our daily lives. The *Guide* is meant to be used in conjunction with a daily practice of Easwaran's Eight Point Program, based on passage meditation. We do not recommend following the Practical Exercises if you are not practicing this program according to the instructions given in Sri Easwaran's book *Meditation*, which can be found on our Web site, www.nilgiri.org. A brief list of those points can be found at the end of this *Guide*.

The Practical Exercises are suggestions for you to explore as they seem appropriate in your life. If you are already familiar with Sri Easwaran's books, you will have seen some of these exercises before. But we suggest that you take this opportunity to really put them into practice, and discover their great power to deepen your spiritual life. Try them in moderation, exercising your common sense and not taking them to extreme lengths. Easwaran always emphasized the importance of the middle path.

Before or after watching each talk, we suggest that you read through the notes and the Practical Exercise. Then, after watching the talk, try to put the exercise into action in your life. A week or so later, you may find it interesting to watch the talk again, with the experience of the exercise fresh in your mind. You may want to note the results in a journal.

A full listing of our fellowship groups (called Satsangs) is available on our Web site. For more information about this series, other publications of Sri Easwaran and Nilgiri Press, and a schedule of retreats based on the Eight Point Program, please contact

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