

THE TALKS OF EKNATH EASWARAN

25 *Becoming Absorbed in Meditation* & *Courage, Confidence, and Compassion*

STUDY GUIDE

Table of Contents

WEEKLY LESSONS

Lesson One: 2

Lesson Two: 5

Lesson Three: 7

Lesson Four: 9

TRANSCRIPTS

Becoming Absorbed in Meditation: 12

Courage, Confidence, and Compassion: 17

Terms and References: 23

Verses: 24

Starting with this DVD – number 25 in our Video of the Month series – the study guides form a self-study course called *The Dynamics of the Mind*. Each study guide includes four lessons designed either for a spiritual fellowship group session or for personal study. If you are using this course on your own, or if you would like to engage in further discussion about the lessons, you are welcome to participate in our e-mail discussion group based on this course. Please e-mail to estudygroup@nilgiri.org for more information.

The DVD format offers several advantages that you may want to make use of in your study of these talks:

In order to enhance your comprehension of the talk, you can switch on the subtitles option as you watch the talk.

If you prefer to watch the talk in shorter segments, you can watch one section at a time. Go to the section menu and select the section you would like to watch. Each half-hour talk is divided into two sections of about 15 minutes each.

If your spiritual fellowship group wishes to watch 15 minutes of video per week, you can allot 45 minutes of your meeting to reading and discussion of *Conquest of Mind* (along the lines suggested below), and watch one section of the DVD before meditation. We recommend that you start meditating directly after watching the segment.

LESSON ONE

Introduction

Our focus this week is on training the mind to act in freedom, which allows us to respond creatively to the challenges that life brings. We'll start by reading an excerpt from Chapter One of *Conquest of Mind*, then we'll discuss how the Eight Points, and especially meditation and the mantram, help us respond in freedom to the unexpected problems that come up in our lives.

Reading from Conquest of Mind

Coming from South India, I had never seen surfing until I came to California. The sport still fascinates me. I stood back and watched while one brave soul turned his back on a powerful swell and tried to get to his feet. The wave picked him up and tossed him aside into its crest, spinning his board into the air like a missile. If that had happened to me, I would have swum straight for the beach and hauled myself out on the sand, leaving my board to anyone who wanted to claim it. But this fellow was made of different stuff. He retrieved his board and waited there for the next wave to come. Again the same thing happened – and again he came back for more.

The other young man had more experience. He knew just where he wanted to be, and when the next wave rolled in he caught its pace with a couple of swift, sure strokes. In seconds he was on his feet, cutting back and forth along the face of that wall of water as if making the ocean do his bidding were the easiest thing in the world.

Suddenly the wave arched overhead and crashed down, apparently drowning the poor chap in an avalanche of water. I expected to see his board shoot into the air like his friend's. But a moment later, crouching like a runner ready to spring from the block, he shot triumphantly from a tunnel of spray and swung his board up over the back of the wave, out of danger. The same waves from which I had wanted to run, he had harnessed and learned to ride.

All of us, I think, would like to enjoy that kind of mastery in living. Who doesn't respond to the thought of taking life's waves and riding them with effortless grace? Countless books and tapes today appeal to our yearning for a key to life, or at least to a part of life, which only experts know: methods, secrets, tips, or tactics for mastering the forces that otherwise master us. To judge from the records of ancient civilizations, this must be one of the oldest of human desires. Is there a key

to our destiny? If so, do we have a say in it, or are our character and fate fixed by the stars?

The Buddha's answer, set out more than twenty-five hundred years ago, has a very modern appeal. Our destiny, he said, lies in our own hands: "All that we are is the result of what we have thought. We are formed and molded by our thoughts." It follows that what we shall be tomorrow is shaped by what we think today. To this penetrating observation he added a simple twist. "Don't try to control the future," he would say. "Work on the one thing you can learn to control: your own responses."

If we merely react to life, this implies, we have no more freedom of choice than that log the ocean was playing with. We go where life pushes and pulls us. But if we can choose our responses, we have mastered life. Like a skilled surfer, we don't need to ask for perfect waves. Where is the challenge in that? We show our skill by how well we can handle whatever the sea sends.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

In your experience with the Eight Points, what has helped you in this difficult art of choosing your responses, rather than having them dictated to you by circumstances? How might you improve your practice to increase your freedom?

Inspiration

When it is time for inspiration, please read the Introduction to *Conquest of Mind*, and as much of Chapter One as you have time for. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON TWO

Introduction

This week we are continuing our study of Chapter One of *Conquest of Mind*. We'll start by reading an excerpt about getting free from conditioned responses, and then we'll explore how to use the mantram and meditation to do that.

Reading from Conquest of Mind

How many times have you exclaimed, "I wish I could stop thinking that! I wish I could stop craving this. I wish I didn't always react like a vending machine to this kind of person or that kind of situation. I wish I could be different from the way I am!" The Buddha would reply, "You can." If you have felt this desire fervently, you have what it takes to learn to live in freedom.

Each of us would like to be able to think what he or she wants to think. Yet how many do you know who can do this? The mind is very much like a television set with no controls, which goes on when the mood strikes it and shows whatever it pleases.

Imagine that you are sitting in your living room, listening to little Joey tell you about his basketball game, when suddenly the television switches on. "Here," it commands. "Watch me!" You say, "Yes, sir." You don't like the program, and you don't really want to look at television when Joey is trying to talk to you. But the TV has caught your attention. The set says, "I feel like showing this now, so you sit back and watch." And while Joey goes on, you look at him occasionally and say, "Uh-huh," but you're not really there; your mind is on the tube.

Then, abruptly, the set announces, "That's it for now." And despite your pleas, it turns itself off.

Most of us, if we had a set like this, would think we were caught in a science fiction movie. But this is exactly what the mind does. It puts on any show it likes and that is what we have to think; it switches channels when it likes and that is what we have to accept. "I can tell my hand what to do," Augustine once observed, "and it obeys. Why can't I do the same with my mind?"

Today, of course, most homes have a remote control device for the television set. You lean back in a chair, press a button, and the set goes on. If you don't like the commercial telling you what to have for breakfast, you press another button and the sound goes off. If you want to change channels, press a button; if you want to stop the show, just press again – whenever you choose. So when I go to a friend's home to watch tennis, my host puts the remote control in my hands. I watch Boris Becker play Ivan Lendl, and the moment a commercial cuts in or the commentators start talking about how much money is at stake, I turn off the sound and rest my eyes. This is using television in freedom, and it is the way to use the mind in freedom too.

People sometimes object, "Having a trained mind sounds so mechanical! What about spontaneity, creativity?" Even with television, I think you will agree, nothing is more mechanical than sitting on the couch like a potato and watching whatever comes on. It is the same with the mind. Nothing is less spontaneous than thinking whatever pops into your head, because there you have no choice. Almost all thinking is conditioned, stimulus and response. Only when choosing in freedom does the human being truly come to life.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

Does this sound familiar? Are there times in your life when you find your mind behaving like this science-fiction TV set? How have you used the Eight Points to counteract that? How might you use them more – and particularly the mantram – to get control over this mental process?

Inspiration

When it is time for inspiration, read the following introduction and play the first of the two talks on this DVD, "Becoming Absorbed in Meditation," which is about 27 minutes long.

The most important part of this talk comes at the end, when Sri Easwaran outlines a deep and challenging ideal in meditation – total absorption in the inspirational passage. Leading up to that, he is commenting on a practical set of verses from the Dhammapada. He presents the spiritual life as a reversal of the normal perspective, which limits our vision and life. Throughout this talk he contrasts the "normal" and spiritual perspectives on pride and embarrassment, selfishness and selflessness, security and insecurity, and shows how the spiritual life leads to true security, which then helps us reach for absorption. The presentation here is not a judgmental or moral one, but a dynamic one. We are being shown a way to direct our mental activity towards the most positive outcomes.

LESSON THREE

Introduction

This week we're continuing our study of Chapter One in *Conquest of Mind*, entitled "Thinking in Freedom." Our theme has been the difficult art of responding in freedom – learning to set aside our conditioned reactions so we can respond to challenging situations calmly and creatively. This week we are going to concentrate on attention: how we can enrich our relationships by learning to focus our attention steadily.

We'll start by reading an excerpt from the chapter, then discuss its application to our practice. Sri Easwaran has just been writing about how restlessness and an inability to focus attention can make us lose interest in those we love, and disrupt our relationships:

Reading from Conquest of Mind

We do not lose interest in people because they get less interesting; we lose interest because our mind is restless. It is the nature of an untrained mind to keep moving, moving, moving. But the mind is infinitely teachable. You can make it natural for your mind not to move, but to dwell like a laser wherever you place it. That is the secret of genius, and it is the secret of satisfying relationships too. When you tell your mind "Stay," it will stay. You can keep giving Joey your full attention instead of letting it be snatched away by the TV. You can keep giving your partner your respect and love even if he gives you cause for feeling differently.

Most wonderfully, I think, you can bring back all the delight and freshness you first felt in any personal relationship. What made those moments memorable was that your attention was riveted on the object of your love. When your mind is trained, you can keep this sense of delight and wonder alive always; it will actually grow with the passage of time. This is the greatest wealth a human being can have: relationships that never turn stale or sour but go on growing in depth and beauty.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

In this excerpt, Sri Easwaran has given us a way to measure our progress along the path of freedom. Can anyone give an idea of what that measure is? [Leave time for a few answers here, then go on to:] Freedom in directing our thoughts and attention can be measured by how rich and fresh our relationships are, by our own reckoning. In other words, we ourselves will

feel that our relationships “never turn stale or sour but go on growing in depth and beauty.” Progress will show itself by how much this already applies in our relationships with others.

How have you used the Eight Points, and especially One-Pointed Attention, to renew or enrich relationships? What more might you do?

Inspiration

When it's time for inspiration, please read from Chapter Four of *Meditation*, by Eknath Easwaran, “One-Pointed Attention.” Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON FOUR

Introduction

We're concluding our study of the first chapter of *Conquest of Mind*, on the theme of "Thinking in Freedom." In the past three sessions we've been discussing the difficult art of exercising conscious choice over the thoughts we think and the ways we direct our attention.

This week, we'll consider the attitude we bring to this difficult work. We'll start with a reading in which Sri Easwaran is comparing meditation and the allied disciplines to the strenuous, often thankless work that is required of ballet dancers.

Reading from Conquest of Mind

I remember the first time I saw Rudolf Nureyev, one of the greatest ballet stars of the modern world, doing scenes from *Swan Lake* and *Romeo and Juliet* – gliding and pirouetting without effort, springing into the air as gracefully as a deer. He has taught his body to listen to whatever his creative impulse commands, and to obey so effortlessly that defying gravity seems natural. You just run and leap, run and glide; it's not hard at all.

Later, in a documentary, I saw some of the scenes behind the scenes, where great dancers work at their art for five or six hours every day. Some of the exercises they were doing were most uninteresting – in fact, they were downright dull. We like to think of ballerinas as glamorous, doing glissades and leaps and pirouettes all day. The fact is that if you want to be a ballerina, you have to spend thousands of hours doing one of the most boring exercises I can imagine: clinging to a bar and kicking up your legs over and over, while you perspire and get more and more disheveled.

To me those dancers looked like galley slaves, standing there chained to the bars. The slave driver comes and says, "Now: one, two, three; one, two, three," and they kick, kick, kick, day in and day out. People like me would say, "I'm not interested, thank you. Where are the thrills? Where is the glamour? Who is that man to say 'one, two, three' and make me kick my heels in the air?" Yet this is what is required to train every part of the body to listen to you. Spontaneity, as any artist or athlete will confirm, comes only after lots and lots of disciplined practice.

That is exactly what I would say about training the mind. If a ballet star has to practice for hours every day, following a special routine under very watchful guid-

ance, should we find it any easier to undo old, rigid, conditioned ways of thinking? The amazing thing is that it can be done at all – and that anybody can learn it, anybody who is prepared to put in the effort.

After seeing the kind of training Nureyev must have undergone, I realized anew why genius has been called just an infinite capacity for taking pains. Dancers like Nureyev are gifted, but their gift is not in having been born with the grace of a deer; it is their immense dedication. So too with the spiritual geniuses of the world: men and women like Teresa of Avila, the Compassionate Buddha, Francis of Assisi, Mahatma Gandhi. They also devoted their lives to training for mastery: not to be able to dance with ease but to be able to love with ease, to think in freedom, to make every response to life a matter of their free choice. By their lives they show us what it means to be a human being.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

In this excerpt, Easwaran emphasizes the difficulty of spiritual disciplines. Sometimes these disciplines are boring, at other times unpalatable. What makes us keep at it? What makes this kind of hard work attractive?

Easwaran seems to be trying very hard to prepare us for difficulties. How does it help to be prepared for difficulties in your practice of the Eight Points? What helps you feel prepared for difficulties? How can you bring greater effort to your practice?

Inspiration

When it's time for inspiration, read the introduction below and watch the second of the talks on this talk, "Courage, Confidence, and Compassion," which is 27 minutes long. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

This talk is a continuation from the last one, dealing with absorption in meditation. This week, Easwaran is exploring ways in which we can conserve our vital energy – our prana – a key to deep absorption. Prana is often drained by fear.

People who attend our retreats sometimes ask, how do we deal with fear? This talk gives a fascinating answer: learn to use fear to help you avoid situations that will endanger or handicap you. The key was brought out in this month's readings: we can control the thinking process through constant practice, and that control will give us mastery over our lives. What had been handicaps now become assets. Again, as it was last week, the focus is on the dynamics of the thinking process, not on moralistic judgments. As in *Conquest of Mind*, Easwaran is explaining

the mental dynamic which underlies so many of our personal and international problems, and is showing how to use meditation to set them right.

BECOMING ABSORBED IN MEDITATION

Transcript for August 11, 1978, part one

These are the four concluding verses of the twenty-second chapter of the Dhammapada in which the Buddha uses one of the most effective methods of spiritual instruction, to show both the paths, the downward path and the upward path – and then leaves the choice to us.

You may remember in the Gita too, Sri Krishna, will present the way of ascent and also the way of descent and again leave it to our discrimination, our determination to make the right choices. In commenting upon these four verses, I'm reminded very much of the great shloka in the Bhagavad Gita,

*Ya nisha sarvabhutanam tasyam jagarti samyami
Yasyam jagrati bhutani sa nisha pashyato muneh*

Sri Krishna asks Arjuna, "Look at the vast majority of human beings. What they think the day is, it is really night. And what they think the night is, it is really day." It's a stark contrast between the selfish life and the selfless life. The bound life and the free life. The miserable life and the joyful life. The worldly life and the spiritual life.

Even for a spiritual aspirant in the early stages it is not difficult to see how much suffering is caused by selfishness, self-will, by the pursuit of one's own pleasure and profit, if necessary at the expense of others.

In fact, when we look around the world today, instead of pouring over tomes of economics, or tomes of sociology, to find answers to our most baffling problems in life, if only we could persuade the vast majority of people to think more and more of the larger number around them, to devote more of their time and energy, the same time and energy they now devote to the satisfaction of their selfish personal impulses, and the catering to their self-will, if they could use the same energy and the same time and, if I may say, the same dedication, to helping those around – to become aware of the needs of those around – many of the so-called sociological problems may disappear.

Selfishness is the cause of a large number of problems – domestic strife, physical deterioration, emotional distress, and alienation from others as well as oneself. Last night, for example, there was a very interesting scene of a quarrel between a husband and a wife in Sheridan's *School for Scandal*. That quarrel could take place anywhere. And it was so absurd, so meaningless, and yet so painful, that the answer to the problems given rise to by that quarrel, is to put the other first. Such quarrels do not arise then.

I'm not saying it is easy. I'm not saying it is going to take place overnight but wherever people have personal problems, they flare up, they use unkind language, they get angry, they call upon the stars to strike others down. The answer to all this is to become less selfish, to become aware of the needs of others more and more. Now, Sri Krishna says, just as the Buddha says now, what we should really be ashamed of is selfishness. What we should really be embarrassed about is self-will. What we should really work on is how to reduce self-will, how to reduce selfishness, which gradually alleviates many, many problems in personal relations, in health, in security, and of course, on the spiritual path.

And the Buddha now contrasts: what are the usual things that people are ashamed today? Of poverty. And we have a story in India of a man who was rather poor, even by Indian standards, who was set upon by two bandits, strong muscular bandits, but who put up a splendid fight and could be held down only with great difficulty by these two professional holdup men. Finally they got hold of his wallet and opened it. There were the Indian equivalent of two blue chips. One penny, the worse for wear. They were so astonished that they asked this man, "You really risked your life to save these two stamps and one worn-out penny?" And the man said, "Oh, no, not at all, you misunderstand me greatly. I didn't want my financial condition to be exposed."

See this is where the Buddha is speaking direct to us: What is there to be ashamed of when you're leading a simple life? Instead of going and saying, "Look at the Cadillac in my garage." I'm now using a Kerala joke. In Kerala there are different kinds of bus services. They are all NMS and MMS, Malabar Motor Service, and NMS, Nice Motor Service. And a high school joke, Julia, is LMS, Leg Motor Service.

High school students usually say, "How did you come to school?"

"LMS."

It's an old, old joke. It still works.

And people have become ashamed of walking, just imagine. That's what we should be proud of, "How did you come all the way from Tomales to Petaluma?"

"LMS, walked sixteen miles and feel fresh as a daisy."

This is what we should all be proud of.

Similarly, when you try to borrow security from your car, that is something to be ashamed of. When you try to borrow status from your clothes, that is something not worthy of us.

And I remember the mother of an old friend of ours used to ask me after attending my talks, “Whenever you mention your Goodwill suit, why do you always say \$2.50? Don’t you know that this is not considered to be very appropriate to reveal these figures in public?”

I said, “That’s the reason why I reveal it. I want you to know that I don’t depend upon my clothes for my security. What I am trying to tell people is, Drop in at a secondhand clothes store, and you can get a nice suit.” In those days for \$2.50. Now it’s already about \$10.

And we get so embarrassed, you know, if we find our suits are secondhand. And here it is I would apply the words of the Buddha, it is good to look neat, it is good to make the best of our personal appearance; but you should be very pleased and very happy to announce that it has cost you so little. In everything it is like that.

Now the Buddha says, what we really should be ashamed about is – just as we would all be ashamed very much if there were a hole in the back of our jacket, revealing a hole in our shirt, everybody, even the most Bohemian character, if the hole were to go through the jacket and the shirt and the T shirt, even the Bohemian will wince and try to cover it up with a newspaper, while walking along.

And the Buddha is dramatizing the situation. What is there? Through the hole, through three holes, they’ll be able to see a healthy, glowing brown skin, or a healthy glowing black skin or a white skin. What is there to be ashamed about? People who want to satisfy their curiosity, let them look through the three holes. And if you are secure enough, stop and say, “I’ll give you time to make a study of this.”

You’ve taken care of clothes very well – we still make the best of our personal appearance. But all the time we used to spend formerly on these clothes now we give at the hospital or we give at the neighborhood church or in our ashram, or any selfless cause that promotes the welfare of society.

[Section Two]

The second is those who fear what they should not fear. I suppose the phrase that is commonly used is the fear of loss of face, which is a fear that haunts millions of people. What would others think? “What would Mrs. Grundy say?” You are familiar with Mrs. Grundy? How would Mr. Grundy respond to this particular piece of news? What would be the conversation at the country club about us?

And in the *School for Scandal*, the first act is what happens to people who have a lot of time on their hands and don’t know what to do with it, talking about others, gossiping about others to

such an alarming extent that I used to characterize Sheridan's *School for Scandal* as a morality play. Even the names: Mr. Backbite, and the very interesting character, Mr. Snake. It's very much characteristic of the morality play. And the law of karma says, all those who indulge in gossip, they come to grief.

And the victim of gossip, Charles, who is honest, aware of his drawbacks but who has a big heart and who really wants to reform when circumstances are just right, he does not go down the downward path.

In other words, instead of being afraid of what other people are going to think, what other people are going to say about it, I think the Buddha would say, "You really have got to be afraid of what your real Self is going to think." The real Self, if he could talk, or she could talk, or it could talk, would say, "Here am I, selfless, and this fellow goes on being hypocritical through his selfishness trying to cover my selfless face."

Similarly, the Atman is ever secure. The Atman does not need any kind of outward support, any kind of outward recognition. The nature of the Atman is complete security. And in the Upanishads the sages say beautifully, "To the person who has realized the Atman, who has attained Self-realization, you can give all that you have, he is still full. You can take away all that you have given, back, he's still full." This fullness is unaffected. And every day we can remind ourselves that our status depends upon how much we are aware of the needs of others and how much we try to meet those needs. Even though we hear it often, it is not easy to practice it.

And I would say over and over again, particularly in view of our new ideal in meditation, which is absorption, being aware of the needs of all those around and turning your attention to meet those needs, helps absorption. If you get absorbed in your own private pleasures, and profits, that can act as an impediment to this ideal of total absorption. Which is now becoming very real for us in meditation. To repeat what I was saying last evening, which seems to have inspired so many of us, after ten years of sadhana I've come to have great confidence now in you. And the gigantic step we are now taking in meditation is very difficult and not free from danger. The time is past when we were dealing with distraction, when we were dealing with the sleeping problem. The time has come now when our aim is positive, to get absorbed.

I can give you a few little hints. As to what the signs are of absorption. One would be your senses will slowly close down. Sounds, external stimulation, even though there may be a dim awareness of it, it'll be like writing on water. As soon as you write on water it disappears, so these distractions do not have any affect at all. That's one of the signs.

Second is where you used to sleep formerly, now you're able to keep awake. Therefore, please don't let sleep overcome you because that very same wave of sleep that is trying to overcome you, can be used to be ridden upon, just as a surfer does it. When you see the wave of sleep coming from the depths of your consciousness, instead of trying to lower your head and

succumb to that sleep, what you're able to do now, with this ideal of absorption, is jump on the wave of sleep, and keep awake, concentrated on the inspirational passage. You'll find that you're not on the same old level of awareness, that you've changed to a new level just because now, instead of this wave of sleep overcoming you, you're able to use it as a surfer uses a high wave.

Third is the inspirational passage slows down greatly but the theme is still clear, the connection is still clear. And please make sure that even though the inspirational passage has slowed down that you're able to keep the connection intact. And just for a minute or half a minute your repetition of the words of the inspirational passage will do away with subject-object duality for just a little while. At that time it is almost as if you're not reciting. The words of the inspirational passage are reciting themselves.

It is a very poor attempt at explaining what cannot be explained, but that is the sign that absorption is slowly beginning. But make sure that you don't let go of the inspirational passage.

I've tried to give you some of the signs by which you can make out that you are progressing well towards absorption. But make sure that during the day that you follow all these disciplines with sustained enthusiasm, repetition of the mantram, training of the senses, and particularly, opening your awareness to the people around you and not letting self-will or selfishness come in the way.

COURAGE, CONFIDENCE, AND COMPASSION

Transcript for August 11, 1978, part two

According to the Buddha there is only one thing to be feared in life and that is that you're on the downward path. If you're more angry today than you were yesterday, the Buddha would say that's a cause for fear. If you're more impatient today than you were yesterday, that's another cause for fear. And in my own small daily life I take a few minutes every day at the end of the day to have a bird's-eye view of where I can improve the quality of my daily living.

Please remember it's not a negative survey. It is a positive survey, "Where can I be a little more patient? Can I be a little more loving toward Julia? Can I be a little more supportive of Jessica or be a little more helpful to Joshua?" These are the positive ways in which we can improve the quality of our daily living tomorrow in the light of what we have done today.

Interestingly enough, it seems to make every day new for you. It is never the same old day. There is always something more to be done, some steps more to be taken on the path upward, some greater care to be taken to avoid the mistakes all of us make every day in a small way.

Instead of repining over those mistakes, or regretting over those mistakes, or being resentful of yourself over those mistakes, I would suggest that we take every possible care not to repeat those mistakes tomorrow, and to make a little improvement at least in our daily behavior, in our personal conduct tomorrow.

The next is those who see evil where there is no evil, and do not see evil where there is evil.

For this we have many, many examples we must have been using in almost every class. When I used to talk about smoking in the early days about twenty years ago, I don't think anybody took me seriously. They thought I was being penny-wise and pound-foolish. And it is now that in the latest research smoking is not penny-foolish, it is pound-foolish.

And the Buddha is asking us, look upon this as the cause of great fear, the cause of great tragedy. And alcohol, for example, over a long period it weakens the will, clouds the judgment, lays such a burden on our family and friends that it is difficult for me to believe when I read in the paper about great people in great positions becoming victims of alcoholism.

And the Buddha now says, "Fear whatever brings calamity to others. Fear whatever brings calamity to yourself. These are to be feared."

The last one is very much on the positive note. This is where the Buddha really becomes superb as a teacher. Simple words, short sentences, direct instruction. He says, "Try to discover what should be avoided in life." And then he says, "Avoid it."

This is what I mean, it's so breathtakingly simple. Anger is to be avoided. I don't think anybody knows how ugly we look when we are angry. In fact, it is one of the notes that I used to strike in my freshman class that had immediate effect. In the junior college they hadn't got used to the ways of the sophisticated sophomore. And I used to talk in very simple language. When you look at somebody who is angry, you're looking at an ugly face. It's a very easy reminder for young people because this is something that touches us immediately.

And a face, the face of a person who is slow to wrath, as the Bible puts it, who would be able to put up very cheerfully with displeasing circumstances, irritating people, those who cause trouble to others and to themselves – there is a beauty about that face that grows upon us even though it may take time for us to discover it.

In personal relationships, after all is said and done, with the passage of time there are many physical changes that are likely to occur that are not going to improve our physical beauty. And to apply the language of the Buddha, avoid anger, avoid greed.

There was a painting by a Belgian painter in the olden days, Magritte. I think Thel showed me the actual appeal of the painting. This is about a plate – it's called a still-life study of an egg, over, and the person is looking through the window at this plate. The painter has caught the greed and the gluttony and fixed the eye right in the yolk. Is it the yolk or the other one? That's why even in shopping, you know, you just go along. Even if you don't spend money, the eyes do not look beautiful. Look detached. Just shoot a casual glance and say, "So what?"

And particularly when I see these – I'm trying to show you how my response is, some of these striking poses in some of these big stores, sometimes headless or sometimes carrying their head in their hand like old Ichabod Crane – I used to ask Christine, "Who do you think will respond to this?" What they'll do is to laugh. "Who will be tempted to buy just because somebody has learned to carry his head in his hands?"

And I think it conserves prana greatly. After all, we want the right clothes. If you want them and you can't make them, you have to buy them. And to be able to know exactly what we want, to walk into a store, go straight into the corner where they have exactly what we want, pick them up, and come back to the cashier like a horse that has blinders, neither looking here nor there, that's mastery, of the senses and of finances.

I'd like to see how many can do it. I used to think formerly – I used to talk only about women customers – but I've seen too many men customers now. Some of the beauty salons, some of the hairstyle places, are as crowded by men as they are by women, so it applies to both impartially, to be able to go into a store and say to your companion, give me three minutes, make it five and I'll be out.

You'll see how difficult it is. Just as you are coming back there is a sale – forty percent off. Only today. And I remember when we wanted to buy a carpet there was a place around Lake Merritt where we saw a sign, “Sale Only for This Month. Come One, Come All. This Is Buying Time for You. It's Crying Time for Us.” And I fell for the advertisement.

I remember saying, “It's only for one month. It's only two or three days left. Let's buy it up.” And some years later we went past that way, it still says “One Month Sale. Come One, Come All. It's Buying Time for You. It's Crying Time for Us.”

In other words, the capacity to withstand the pressure of the advertiser is the capacity to control the mind. See, they can appeal to you in so many ways. Where diseases are concerned, the way people talk, what all diseases they can make us aware of. And particularly I remember even when I was in India in what all ways they could make people spend money.

So the way when you are secure, you don't respond to these advertisements; and when you're healthy, you're not afraid of disease. It is people who are not leading healthy lives who are looking for some panacea that will enable them to eat more and digest less, to walk less and live more. This is how security comes – avoiding them.

[Section Two]

For me entertainment is part of the spiritual life. That's why I make sure – particularly for our young people, this is their summer vacation – that they get the best in entertainment available in the area. And even where entertainment is concerned, I was looking today at all the movie programs in all the Bay Area and I don't find one where I can take anybody in whom I have a friendly interest.

So, let us remember this when we are trying to take somebody to a show. I don't mind a certain amount of uproarious fun. For example, the *Revenge of the Pink Panther* is not very great visual art or audible art, but it's a lot of fun. Particularly jokes like the one Sumner recalled where somebody was trying to escape from a hospital and the man is caught and the Peter Sellers says, “He's crazy.”

And the attendant says, “We never use that word here.”

So Peter Sellers asks, “What is the word you use here?”

“We say, ‘Now, now.’”

Peter Sellers says, “He's now, now.”

It may not be the highest of humor. It may not be the highest of humor, but it causes laughter. It does nobody any harm. And when I was standing there – Barbara was taking a very nice photograph of me standing with a lot of people – somebody again said, “That is Satyajit Ray.” Now if ever it reaches Satyajit Ray’s ears that he was seen patronizing the *Revenge of the Pink Panther*, all the awards will be taken back from him.

In other words, I am not saying that we should set up impossibly high standards. But, we have to remember there are certain things that do harm, that leave a scar. And some of the films that I see, I think with a most lenient attitude I would say they are a great disservice rendered by people who have talent but who have no discrimination at all.

Then, avoiding temptation, which is very much using the language of Jesus the Christ, it is good, sound advice. There are many, many occasions where, when we get into it, we may not know that the soup is coming up to the ankles, then to the knees. That’s the time – when you see that it has come up to your knees – that’s the time to jump out. That’s why, don’t wait until you are caught. Don’t wait until you are trapped. That’s how I would paraphrase the words of Jesus the Christ, “Lead us not into temptation.” And I remember for many years during my sadhana I would decline to go to certain occasions when my friends would invite me, and say, “It isn’t good for my sadhana.” They used to say, “You’re all right. You have discrimination.” But, this is tempting providence.

Because even if you do not succumb to the temptation, the thought is going to come back with you.

*Dhyayato vishayan pumsah sangas teshupajayate
Sangatsamjayate kamah kamat krodho ‘bhijayate
Krodhad bhavati sammohah sammohat smritivibhramah
Smritibhramshad buddhinasho buddhinashat pranashyati*

I used to repeat this when I would find myself almost moving into a tempting situation. I had only to repeat these verses which would be like a clap of thunder in my consciousness, giving the detachment and the discrimination to run away as fast as my legs would allow me. Now, there are modern social commentators who will say, this is cowardice. The Buddha will say, this is prudence. There are modern commentators who will say, you lack courage. The Buddha will say, you have courage.

There will come a time, after many years, when you’ve the capacity to get absorbed in the Self, at will. To be able to jump over the body and the mind in that kind of leapfrog that children play and be one with the Atman, united with the Self. Where you are impregnable. No temptations can reach you. No external threats can affect you.

And as the Gita says again,

*Ragadveshaviyuktas tu vishayan indriyaish charan
Atmavashyair vidheyatma prasadam adhigacchati
Prasade sarvadhukhanam hanir asyopajayate
Prasannachetaso hyashu buddhih paryavatishthate*

It's a marvelous verse, which says when your senses have become faithful friends of yours, when your passions will listen to you at will, what danger can you face in life? Where can there be temptation? You are in complete panoply. No enemy can touch you. You can go into the midst of temptation and bring others out.

That is the state that we should aim at in total absorption. Not to be afraid of dangers. Not to avoid temptations when we are established in the Self. But to be able to face problems with courage, confidence, and compassion. To face tempting situations so that we can bring others out. This is what we are aiming at in total absorption. It is not living in a germ-free world. It is living in a world where we can rescue people from the difficulties which ignorant living has cost the modern world.

And no evil where there is none. Where you become established in the Self like that, where two people quarrel, you don't see evil. You see an opportunity to bring them together. Where two countries quarrel, you don't see evil. You see an opportunity to bring them together.

And this can be done through persuasion. The Buddha concludes by saying, such men follow the true doctrine. They go up. After warning us about how anger, fear, greed, selfishness, self-will, violence, this brings everybody down. He now concludes this powerful chapter by striking a positive note by saying avoid whatever is selfish – however pleasant it may be, however conditioned you may be. Cultivate whatever is selfless, however unpleasant it may be. Train your senses. They can be trained very well. Master your passions. It may be very difficult, but as the Buddha puts it again, there is no friend like a mind that is trained well.

The Buddha actually puts it very pungently by “not even a father and mother, not husband and wife, not brother and sister, not son and daughter can be your greatest friend, as a trained mind.” You can have a little button, “I have a good friend in my mind that listens to me.” Or you can have another button, “Do you?” Or, just as you find campers, “You are following an aristocrat.” You can say, “Follow a good friend, follow a true friend.”

When you are selfish, easily agitable, ready to go after your own personal profit and pleasure, you have the worst kind of friend. Distinguish between a true friend and a false friend.

To conclude with a short story which I must have repeated many times. Two fellows were walking through an Indian jungle. And they saw a hungry bear coming in their direction with expectant eyes. One of them ran up a tree like a squirrel. The other fellow did not know how

to climb so he lay down. And the bear came and looked at this fellow who was right at the top of the branch, gave him up as a bad job, and came down and looked at this fellow who was playing possum, looked at him, smelled him, and left.

The other fellow came down and asked, "What did the bear say in your ear?"

He said, "Don't make friends with fellows like you."

Don't make friends with an untrained mind. In fact don't be on speaking terms at all. Make friends with a trained mind. Be on good terms with a trained mind. And, all is well that ends well.

TERMS AND REFERENCES

- Arjuna** A valiant warrior in the Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, to whom the Lord (Sri Krishna) is speaking in the Bhagavad Gita.
- Atman** The Self, the innermost soul in every creature, which is divine.
- blue chips** Small stamps that were given to customers as a promotion. They could be redeemed for gifts.
- Buddha** [from the Sanskrit budh 'to awake, to understand'] "The Awakened One." Prince Siddhartha was known as the Buddha after his enlightenment.
- Francis of Assisi, Saint** (c. 1181–1226) Christian mystic. Easwaran recommends the use of The Prayer of Saint Francis as a meditation passage.
- Gandhi(ji), Mahatma** (1869–1948) Led India to freedom through a thirty-year struggle based completely on nonviolence. Eknath Easwaran met Gandhi at his ashram.
- Gita** Short for Bhagavad Gita, a central sacred text of India, on which Sri Easwaran wrote a three-volume commentary, *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, published by Nilgiri Press. It is a dialogue between the Lord (as Sri Krishna) and his friend and disciple, Arjuna.
- Ichabod Crane** A character in a story by Washington Irving. He is chased by the Headless Horseman.
- karma** Action, work, behavior. The consequences of action.
- Kerala** Sri Easwaran's home state in South India.
- Magritte, Rene** (1898–1967) Belgian surrealist painter.
- Mrs. Grundy** In Thomas Morton's play *Speed the Plough* (1798), one of the characters continually wonders what her prudishly conventional neighbor Mrs. Grundy will say about any situation.
- Petaluma** A small town near the Blue Mountain Center headquarters in Northern California.
- sadhana** A body of disciplines, a way of life, which leads to the supreme goal of Self-realization.
- Satyajit Ray** Important 20th-century Bengali filmmaker.
- shloka** A particular meter, or a verse in that meter, used in classic works like the Gita.
- Teresa of Avila, Saint** (1515–1582) Christian saint who wrote classics of mysticism including *The Interior Castle* and *The Way of Perfection*.
- The School for Scandal** (1777) Satirical comedy of manners by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, whose cast of characters includes Charles, Snake, and Sir Benjamin Backbite.
- Tomales** Town in California where Easwaran lived.
- Upanishads** Ancient mystical documents found at the end of each of the four Vedas, the central texts of Hinduism.

VERSES

*Ya nisha sarvabhutanam tasyam jagarti samyami
Yasyam jagrati bhutani sa nisha pashyato muneh*

Such a sage awakes to light in the night of all creatures. That which the world calls day is the night of ignorance to the wise. –Bhagavad Gita, Chapter Two, verse 69

*Dhyayato vishayan pumsah sangas teshupajayate
Sangatsamjayate kamah kamat krodho 'bhijayate
Krodhad bhavati sammohah sammohat smritivibhramah
Smritibhramshad buddhinasho buddhinashat pranashyati*

When you keep thinking about sense objects, attachment comes. Attachment breeds desire, the lust of possession which, when thwarted, burns to anger. Anger clouds the judgment; you can no longer learn from past mistakes. Lost is the power to choose between the wise and the unwise, and your life is utter waste. –Bhagavad Gita, Chapter Two, verses 62–63

*Ragadveshaviyuktas tu vishayan indriyaish charan
Atmavashyair vidheyatma prasadam adhigacchati
Prasade sarvaduikhanam hanir asyopajayate
Prasannachetaso hyashu buddhih paryavatishthate
[Note: Easwaran uses another version of the first line: vitaragabhayakrodha.]*

But when you move amidst the world of sense, free from both attachment and aversion, there comes the peace in which all sorrows end, and you live in the wisdom of the Self. –Bhagavad Gita, Chapter Two, verses 64–65

*Blue Mountain Center of Meditation
Post Office Box 256, Tomales, CA 94971
800.475.2369
info@nilgiri.org
www.nilgiri.org*

©2004 by the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation