

THE TALKS OF EKNATH EASWARAN

26 *Changing the Thinking Process* & *The Space between Thoughts*

STUDY GUIDE

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This study guide is part of 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 email discussion group based on this course. Please email 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 tape.

If you prefer to watch the tape in shorter segments, you can watch one segment at a time. Go to the menu and select the segment you would like to watch. Each half-hour talk is divided into two segments 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 segment of the DVD before meditation. We recommend that you start meditating directly after watching the segment.

LESSON ONE

Introduction

This month, as we read and study the second chapter of *Conquest of Mind*, our focus will be on what Easwaran calls the “thinking process.” Once we have learned to control and direct our thinking process, Easwaran says, we become able to make lasting beneficial changes in our character, conduct, and consciousness.

In this first lesson, we will read and reflect on the first section of the chapter, dealing with the dynamic which governs all our conditioned behavior: stimulus & response.

Reading

When I came to Berkeley as a Fulbright scholar in the early sixties, I found a house near a place called Live Oak Park. On the edge of the park sat a couple of tennis courts, and here several days a week the city had stationed a tennis coach with a very good reputation. I had played a bit of tennis in India and had enjoyed it, so I said to myself, “Why not go and benefit from his expertise?”

One morning I carried my racquet over and approached him. “All right,” he said, “stand over there on the other side of the net and let’s take a look at your game.”

I ran to the other court. “Okay,” he called, “go ahead and serve.”

I tossed the ball in the air and hit it for all I was worth. He returned it nicely, I must say. We exchanged a few shots – you might even have called it a rally. I served a few more balls, and then he came to the net and looked at me. “Let’s have a chat,” he said.

I felt flattered. “In only five minutes,” I asked myself, “have I impressed this coach so much? Maybe I have the makings of a Big Bill Tilden.”

“Won’t you sit down?” he said. Then he asked innocently, “Where did you learn to play like this?”

“Oh,” I said, “in India. Right at my university.”

“Who taught you?”

I had him there. “Nobody,” I said. “I taught myself.”

He grimaced. “That’s what I thought!”

And like a really good coach, who is interested not so much in pleasing you as in improving your game, he started in without preamble: “The way you stand is wrong. The way you hold the racquet is wrong. The way you throw the ball in the air is wrong. The way you approach the ball and swing is wrong. Naturally,” he added kindly, “the way you miss it is wrong too.”

My face must have fallen, because he smiled and patted me on the shoulder. “There’s no need to feel discouraged,” he said. “That’s how people who teach themselves tennis usually start.” And he proceeded to give me a list of instructions, ticking them off on his fingers: one, two, three, four, five. “Start doing all this,” he assured me, “and things will begin to go right.”

My grandmother, my spiritual teacher, used this same approach to teach me how to live. You should not picture Granny as a gentle old lady in a rocking chair. She was active and vibrantly alive, tough and tender at the same time, and although she used words sparingly she made each one count. Clearly but compassionately, she would tell me just what I was doing wrong. Then, largely by her personal example, she would show me how to change.

Once, I remember, I got into a senseless squabble with a classmate and came home hurt and angry. Granny took one look at my red eyes and asked, “What happened, son?”

With the simplicity of youth I replied, “Raman called me names.”

My mother would be very tender on these occasions. “Don’t worry,” she consoled me. “What does he know? You’re really a very nice boy.” But Granny just asked, “And then what?”

“Well, he was rude to me, Granny, so I was rude back!”

She shook her head slowly. “What is the connection?”

I had no answer, of course. Then came the words I dreaded most to hear from her lips. “You’re such a bright boy. Tell me, what does his being rude have to do with what you say or do?”

“But Granny,” I said, “he’s impossible to get along with!”

“There is only one person in the world you can hope to control,” she replied drily, “and that is yourself. Work on how you respond. Otherwise you are like a rubber ball: he throws you against the wall and you bounce back.”

Of course, just hearing this kind of advice does not necessarily help much. If my coach had merely said, “You don’t hold the racquet right,” it would not have improved my tennis game. I would have objected, “Show me how I’m holding it wrong and how to hold it right!” What made Granny a consummate teacher is that she could always show me how to solve my problems: by working on my own mind.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

In what areas of your life do you see yourself limited by stimulus/response thinking? Choose one particular area where you feel limited, and where you would like to change. For this reflection exercise, choose a relatively small challenge – one which may be difficult, but could be conquered with some persistence in the Eight Point Program. How does the stimulus/response connection get the better of you in this situation? Does hurry and the speed of your thinking play a role? Do you find that being preoccupied with your own agenda, with little thought for others, makes you more susceptible? What other factors come into play to make you respond to life’s challenges in a way you regret? How might you use the Eight Points to free up some space between stimulus and response?

When it’s time for inspiration, please read the rest of the chapter, entitled “Living Skills,” in *Conquest of Mind*. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON TWO

Introduction

This month we are studying Chapter Two of *Conquest of Mind*, entitled “Living Skills.” Our particular focus is on what Easwaran describes as the thinking process. By mastering this process, we can gain mastery over our lives.

In this week’s reading, Easwaran presents the mind as a kind of factory, turning out thoughts at great speed, most of which are rejects. In this reading and in the talk we’ll watch this week he makes the compassionate point that these “reject thoughts,” like anger, resentment, and selfish grasping, are not really us. We should not identify ourselves or others with these thoughts. Rather, we should learn to see these negative traits simply as products of a flawed thinking process – and learn to repair that process to produce loving, beneficial thoughts.

Reading

One of the major difficulties in learning to train the mind is that it is so hard to stand back and see our thoughts clearly. The mind – everybody’s mind – is a vast factory, producing a continuous stream of thoughts of every description: a wisp of anxiety followed by a strong desire; then another anxiety, a palpable fear, two or three irrelevant memories, a surge of anger . . . the assembly line goes on and on. Most of us see ourselves as nothing more than the product of these thoughts. That is where the danger lies.

This mind factory reminds me of the cotton factories in British India. Madras has produced fine cotton for centuries, but when new manufacturing techniques were introduced they slowed production considerably. We Indians had to wait a good while before getting an opportunity to buy. When the finished product finally appeared in the store, one table would have a small stack of fine cotton, called hanava, and another table would boast a huge pile of rejects. There was a fascinating variety of these. I remember picking up a nice-looking shirt that wrinkled up later like a prickly pear. When my laundryman tried to wash it, disastrous things happened.

Most of the products of our mind factory, too, are rejects. The reason is simple: out of ignorance, or under the banner of some naive notion of freedom, we refuse to

supervise production. Our philosophy is free enterprise, “make whatever you like,” and that is what rejects are all about.

Anger makes a good example. All of us know people who are accident-prone: on their way to deliver a few words in front of the Garden Club they drop their pen, and when they bend over to pick it up, their feet get tangled in the microphone cord and down they go in a heap. It can be tragic. Yet how many more of us are anger-prone! All it takes is thinking angry thoughts a thousand times, enough to make anger a reflex. Then we are capable of flying off the handle and saying and doing unkind things with no provocation at all. This is merely a case of the machines of the mind taking over and running us, which is what conditioning means. Such a simple diagnosis of a terrible problem! But it points the way to a solution, for it locates the answer in the mechanics of the mind.

If you go on turning out the same kind of reject thought over and over, the machinery becomes conditioned: it begins to specialize in manufacturing that particular type of thought. Then, just as the machines in a garment factory might stamp out the same pattern of shirt from several different fabrics, the machines in your mind factory will keep on producing the same pattern of thought. Whatever you put in, you get the same old response: anger, hostility, suspicion, jealousy, whatever the mind has been habituated to turn out.

When we see someone reacting like this we say, “That’s the kind of person he is.” What we should say is “That’s the kind of mind he has” – or, more accurately, “That’s the kind of thinking his mind does.” He has let his mind factory turn out the same response again and again, and now it produces automatically.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

Easwaran says that we tend to identify ourselves with the products of our “mind factory.” We say, “That’s the kind of person I am.” How might you learn not to identify yourself with your thoughts? Easwaran seems to imply that – if we are to see ourselves and others as we really are – we need to have freedom in the way we respond. We need to be able to choose our thoughts, rather than just let them happen.

Let’s try an experiment. Take a few minutes to reflect on your own “mind factory,” especially at those points in your day when it produces “rejects.” What are those occasions? What are the first symptoms that “reject thoughts” are being produced? Please reflect on how you can use the mantram, slowing down, and one-pointed attention as soon as the first symptoms of “reject thoughts” occur – in order to develop freedom in the way your respond.

When it's time for inspiration, please read the introduction below and watch the first talk on this DVD, "Changing the Thinking Process." If you are not using the videos, read "Freedom in Personal Relationships" from *The Mantram Handbook*, by Eknath Easwaran. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

In the readings we have been doing, Sri Easwaran has been explaining how the thinking process – the foundation of what we call our personality – can be changed through a long process of spiritual training. Making these changes can lead to tremendous improvements in our physical, emotional, and spiritual life. In this talk, he refers to those beneficial changes under the general topic of health.

This talk includes a marvelous description of Easwaran's meditation, in which he shows how, with intense concentration, the inspirational passage can become a deeply personal message of transformation.

He closes with an inspiring portrait of the person who has truly trained the mind – secure, content, joyful, and heir to a seemingly inexhaustible supply of patience and endurance. He illustrates that state with the story, drawn from the Indian epic, the Mahabharata, in which the heroine Draupadi receives an inexhaustible cooking vessel from Sri Krishna, who is considered an incarnation of God in the Hindu tradition.

LESSON THREE

Introduction

We are continuing our study of Chapter Two of *Conquest of Mind*, entitled “Living Skills.” Last week, Easwaran compared the mind to a factory, working all the time and turning out many rejects. This week he explores that comparison further and makes an interesting suggestion. By meditating on inspirational passages, he says, we can provide the mind factory with “better raw material.” In our discussion we’ll try to understand how we can use this dynamic to change our thinking patterns.

Reading

Not only could my tennis coach see clearly what a player was doing wrong, he had a systematic method for showing how to set things right. We can do the same with the mind. Through personal experience, I have developed a method for introducing quality control in the mind: the eight points described at the end of this book, which I have followed in my own life.

I do not claim to have made these points up. In fact, part of their appeal is that they appear in all the world’s great spiritual traditions. But because of my Western training, the methods I present are not particular to any country, culture, or religion; they have been well worked out for modern times. They comprise a program anyone can follow for teaching the mind to be calm and kind, just the way my coach would have presented it: one, two, three, four, five .

First and foremost comes meditation, because through meditation we can actually lay our hands on the machinery of the mind. This is imperative, for the mind factory is already in full production: daytime, swing shift, even graveyard. Thoughts love to work through the weekend without pay, and they never call a strike. “We just get into a rhythm,” they would explain, “and we can’t stop.” With this powerful internal machinery always running, it is crucial to have a supervisor on the job.

The method of meditation I teach involves sitting quietly with eyes closed and going slowly, in the mind, through the words of an inspirational passage that appeals to you deeply. It might be a prayer, or a poem from one of the great mystics, or a piece of scripture from any of the world’s religions. This method has several direct effects on the quality of thinking. To begin with, it gives the mind’s machinery bet-

ter raw material. When you sit quietly every morning with your eyes closed, concentrating completely on words that embody your highest ideals, you are giving your mind thoughts of the purest quality to work with during the day.

A perfect example is the opening of the Buddha's "Twin Verses," taken from the Dhammapada:

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: we are formed and molded by our thoughts. Those whose minds are shaped by selfish thoughts cause misery when they speak or act. Sorrows roll over them as the wheels of a cart follow the hooves of the bullock that draws it.

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: we are formed and molded by our thoughts. Those whose minds are shaped by selfless thoughts give joy when they speak or act. Joy follows them like a shadow that never leaves them.

When it comes to substituting high quality for low, however, no passage could improve on the inspiring prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.

One reason this kind of training is so effective is that it uses the same machinery that gives the mind its immense power. For meditation to work, you don't have to reason over, reflect on, question, or answer the words you are meditating on – in fact, if you do, you are letting the mind do its own thing again, letting it produce whatever it wants. Instead, all you have to do is try to give complete attention to one word at a time, and bring the mind back when it wanders. If you are giving a

word your best attention, its meaning cannot help sinking in. Anything else actually keeps the meaning from penetrating.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

Please reflect on one or two of your favorite meditation passages. You may want to read them aloud. As Easwaran says here, they provide your mind with better “raw material” for thinking. How do you see that raw material reflected in the final products – the thoughts and feelings that emerge in your day? How might you use the Eight Points during the day to help in that process, to allow more of those positive images and ideas to emerge in your life?

When it's time for inspiration, please read the introduction below and watch the second talk on this tape, entitled “The Space between Thoughts.” For those not using the videos, you may want either to read the introduction to *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* or ask members of the group to read aloud some of their favorite passages from *God Makes the Rivers to Flow*. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

In the reading we've been doing, Sri Easwaran has repeatedly emphasized the need for training. In this talk we see the practical benefits of that training – in particular, detachment.

Easwaran's main focus is on learning to find – and increase – the space between thoughts. As he will explain, the Buddha's diagnosis of the thinking process led him to discover that, though our thoughts seem continuous, they are not actually connected. When we slow down the mind through meditation, we are able to find the space between thoughts and gain the detachment we need to actually choose what we think.

When we can choose our thoughts, we can also choose how we respond to situations – even very painful or difficult ones. In the last half of the talk, Easwaran tells a story about how his spiritual teacher, his grandmother, helped him gain detachment in such a painful situation. Then he concludes with another story to illustrate the special care we need to exercise not to fall victim to compulsive thoughts and desires that speed up our mind and make it impossible to find the space between thoughts.

During the talk, Easwaran will refer to the concept of samskaras – latent or unconscious patterns of thinking which can be gradually changed through meditation.

LESSON FOUR

Introduction

We are concluding our study of Chapter Two of *Conquest of Mind*. This week our topic is one of great importance to all of us: how to deal with unpleasant memories that cause us to be upset or resentful. Our reading starts with Easwaran's account of the benefits of training the mind through meditation.

Reading

This sounds like plain, dull work, so let me show you some of its very useful applications.

For one, everybody knows how painful it is to keep thinking about an unpleasant memory. Actually, the problem is not the memory but the fact that we cannot stop thinking about it. We can spare ourselves the agitation by withdrawing the mind from that memory completely.

Is this just playing Pollyanna – hiding from problems and pretending they are not there? Perhaps it would be, if worrying could help. But worrying never helps. If you really have to think about the past to solve a problem, think about it, draw your conclusions, and then drop it; don't let your mind run on, turning out the same unproductive stuff.

Meditation can help solve such problems in other ways, too, by going to their root; I shall say more about that later. Here I am simply talking about learning to drop at will those haunting specters from the past that nag, "You're no good, you're no good," or push us unwillingly into the same old situations again and again.

Take resentment, for example. Resentment is nothing more than compulsive attachment to a set of memories. If you could peek through the window of the mind factory when you feel resentful, you would see the production line turning out the same emotion-charged memory over and over: "He did that to me in 1983, he did that to me in 1983 . . ." You are dwelling on something that took place in the past – or, more likely, on how you misunderstood that event and reacted to your misunderstanding. When you keep pumping attention into an event in this way,

even a limp little memory gets blown up into a big balloon of hostility. If you can withdraw your attention, the balloon is deflated. There is nothing more to it.

Once my young nieces brought home a box of balloons and blew them up until our living room was full of them. It was great fun until one of the balloons burst, leaving only a shred of rubber. Similarly, when you stop pumping up a resentment, there is nothing left to cause trouble. Burst balloons can bring tears to children's eyes, but a burst resentment floods the heart with relief and love.

Brooding on memories not only serves no earthly purpose, it can go on until your mind is so filled with balloons that there is no room for the joy of living. But through meditation, by withdrawing your attention from distractions, you can train your mind to the point where no memory can upset you or drive you into compulsive action.

This is not amnesia. Your memories are still there in the file if you need them. What is lost is their emotional charge. The door of the past may still open and let an old memory swagger in, clanking its chains in your face and expecting you to climb under your desk and hide. But with a trained mind you will be able to sit there calmly, watching the show with an expression of infinite tolerance. When it is finished you can clap politely and say, "Very professional performance. Now, if you're quite through, I have things to do." The poor memory, not used to this kind of treatment, will duck its head and slink out, leaving not a trace of disquiet in your mind.

There is no exaggeration in this. Through many years of practice you can gain such command over your thinking process that if there is a spurt of hostility toward someone you have only to look at your mind and say "No." The hostility will wither. If resentment creeps in you can say "Please leave," and it will go. That is why, after more than forty years, I still catch myself thinking every day, "There is nothing like meditation!"

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

In this section, Easwaran is raising a provocative question: how much of our thinking is actually beneficial, or even necessary? Let's explore that question in relation to one of the areas he mentions – worry. How can we differentiate between "productive" thoughts and worrying? Please reflect on your experience and see if you can distinguish between these two ways of thinking about the past. Now reflect on this insight: Worrying is compulsive; it impels itself.

We do not choose to worry, but find ourselves compelled to do it. How can you use the Eight Points to reduce the degree to which you are subject to such worries?

One of the key ideas in this reading is: “through meditation, by withdrawing your attention from distractions, you can train your mind to the point where no memory can upset you or drive you into compulsive action.” How might you use this dynamic to become more free from worry and resentment?

When it's time for inspiration, please reread Chapter Two of *Conquest of Mind*, as a review. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

CHANGING THE THINKING PROCESS

February 17, 1979, Part One

The medical world is slowly opening its doors to understand the part played by the mind in causing illness as well as in curing it. The fact that the medical world is prepared to listen to new theories, new contributions, speaks very well of its capacity to change, to adjust, to go forward.

My particular field happens to be the mind. And as far as I am concerned, I do not have the slightest doubt that the turmoil of the mind can cause serious illness, can adversely affect all the vital organs, can make life a burden for all those who may have money, who may have material possessions, who may have fine jobs, and who may be going round the world every year on their vacation. So when I often say that I hope to use the services of our medical people as well as our research people, not so much for putting forward a new theory or questioning some of the accepted ways of treating illness or preventing illness, what I am looking out for is how to convince, persuade patients, as well as medical people, to change their thinking.

In other words, I am not even so much concerned, personally, about nutrition or about exercise, on which there are experts here. What I am concerned about primarily is that the thinking process can be changed. And the kind of thinking process that results in anger, fear, and lust can be changed, over a long period, through the practice of meditation and the allied disciplines. On this, I do not have any doubt and even if the whole medical world tells me this cannot be done, I would still not have any ruffling of my consciousness, even, because I know it is true, from the lives of many people whom I have had the privilege of guiding in meditation for more than twenty years now.

So, when the term *aroga* is used, it is one of the names given by the Buddha to the state of unitary consciousness, in which all anger, all fear, all lust has been completely transformed into universal love for all.

Just as turmoil can cause detrimental effects on the heart, on the lungs, on the stomach, on the nervous system, similarly, security, serenity, the knowledge that one's life serves a very useful purpose, that every day, one is able to make a small contribution to those around one - this can cause very beneficial changes on the heart, on the lungs, on the stomach, on the nervous system.

And, just as we have been saying in the *Meditation* handbook, as well as the *Mantram Handbook*, why should conditioning always work against us only? We can use the same kind of conditioning to work for us. So, in a sense, this is a very new therapeutic approach, where we try *aroga* to free the human being from every kind of ailment. And the Buddha looks upon

not only, say, headache or stomachache or neuralgia or neurasthenia as ailments, he looks upon resentment just the same way. This is the approach of the Buddha.

See, when we see somebody who is in the throes of neuralgia, we don't condemn him, we don't sit in judgment upon him. We don't say, "Bad fellow, having neuralgia." Or we don't say, "Headache - the fellow is having headache. He is undesirable." Because we are physically oriented, you know, we may have had a twinge of neuralgia or we may have a touch of headache. We can understand. And toothache, you know, everybody feels sympathetic to toothache. I don't know whether you have seen this. In India, where dentists are not too common, only in big cities, sometimes one has to treat toothache with some of these folk remedies in which cloves and cardamoms and things like that play an important part. And you'll find, if somebody is having toothache, everybody sympathizes. They don't say, "A brand plucked from the burning - that's why he's having toothache."

Now the Buddha says, a resentful person needs the same kind of sympathy. A person who gets very angry very easily needs the same kind of sympathy. Don't look upon - it sounds very simple when I say it but that's what the whole world says - "angry person, selfish person." The Buddha will say there is some flaw in the thinking process. And just as neuralgia or headache or peptic ulcer can be corrected, and the person made healthy again, similarly, the resentful person can be treated just as if he had a cold. You know, when the person with a cold comes in, blowing his nose and sits down and coughs and sneezes, it's a bother to everybody but everybody says, "Poor fellow has a cold. What else do you expect?" You're going to sneeze and sniffle and cough and keep chewing lozenges. That's all part of having a cold.

Similarly, here is somebody who you just say something slightly opposed to that person's self-will, he gets angry. You just ask her to do a job that she doesn't like, she gets angry. And we feel very displeased. We say, "He's a very difficult person." This is a common saying, you know. "Very difficult man. Very difficult woman to work with." The Buddha says, would you say that about somebody who has a toothache? Very difficult man to live with? Or would you say somebody who has a stomachache, very difficult woman to live with? Similarly, he says, there is trouble in the thinking process, and the thinking process can be set right by bringing it within our conscious control.

The term that the Buddha uses for this chapter is *tanha*, the Pali form of *trishna* "thirst." Even people, for example, who will not usually raid the refrigerator or help themselves to other people's ginger ale, when they are very thirsty, oh they try for a long time, "Oh, I shouldn't do that. That's Jim's Bitter Lemon, and that is Nick's Sprite. And see, I shouldn't try to raid the refrigerator because it is theirs."

Then I get thirstier and thirstier and thirstier, and the sense of I and you slowly begins to get weak. The demarcation line, you know. It slowly says, "After all, Jim has three bottles. I can have

one. And Nick, he never gets cold, he never gets hot. He's just stocking it for an emergency that's not likely to arise."

And after a limit, hungry people will help themselves to food. Thirsty people will help themselves to drink. The question of to whom it belongs, whether it has to be paid for, becomes immaterial.

That's what happens, for example, to self-willed people. When self-will rises to a certain level, afterwards, the thought that it may hurt David or Ed or Richard doesn't occur. The line has disappeared. That self-will has to express itself and it can express itself in harsh words. It can express itself in very unkind action. It can express itself for the person in turmoil. To be harsh, the mind has to be in turmoil. This is why I said the Buddha is talking about mental states. He says we are all concerned when somebody – when, say, Iago has said something very discourteous to David. We are all concerned with David. The Buddha says, I am concerned with Iago, too. The fellow is in constant turmoil. And this is what brings compassion.

Instead of being resentful of the person who is unkind to you – it doesn't mean that you're going to connive at it, it doesn't mean that you're not going to resist it nonviolently – you're also able to see that that person's mind is in turmoil and it's like another complaint, just as for ulcer or for rheumatism. The Buddha says, there is a prescription for turmoil.

[Part Two]

And it is important for all of us to remember the various aspects of sadhana which makes me always say, meditation and the allied disciplines. More than once during the last twenty years, somebody will come up to me and say, "We like meditation, we understand. But why should you emphasize these allied disciplines? Just give us meditation and stick to your meditation. Why bring in the allied disciplines?"

And this is where – look at the picture. If your self-will is eliminated, extinguished, your mind is stilled. You don't have to work on the mind. If you do this, you are doing that. If your self-will goes out, your mind has become still. Or people who say, "Oh, we have great difficulty in self-will." I say, work on the mind. If your mind becomes still, self-will is extinguished. If the mind is still, the ego is gone. If the ego is gone, body-consciousness has been broken through. If identification with the body has been broken through, death has been conquered. You can see all these are connected together.

And in the language of the first volume of the Bhagavad Gita. We are, as you know, gathering the pages of the first volume together now. And we have added a new title which is very good – The End of Sorrow. The Buddha will say, in his inimitable way, "What do I not teach? I do not teach theories, concepts, metaphysics, theology. What do I teach? I teach the end of sorrow."

And in the Bhagavad Gita, all of us must be familiar with those great verses, which haunt me all the time. Remember last time, I said, every time I hear that verse, it's like it's new for me. It's a knock on the door. The postman comes in, says, "You sign here. There is a registered letter for you." Addressed to me. This is what the verse should come to mean for every one of you: personally, intimate, urgent. And it'll give you the desire, the greatest of desires to bring all sorrow to an end, not only for oneself but to play a small part in bringing all sorrow to an end for others too. This is the joy of living. This is victorious living.

And the Gita says,

vitaragabhayakrodhah vishayan indryaish charan
atmavashyair vidheyatma prasadam adhigacchati
prasade sarvadhukhanam hanir asyopajayate
prasannachetaso hyashu buddhih paryavatishtate

Those who are free from likes and dislikes, those who have trained their mind to be even, to be still, when things go wrong for us or right for us, when people behave kindly towards us or unkindly towards us, when fortune smiles on us or frowns on us, such people, the Gita says, vishayan indriyaish charan: they move in the world without reacting to it. They have attained such utter detachment from themselves that they are able to have their love flow towards all around without waiting for the question, "Is he being nice to me? Is she being nice to me?" This question is irrelevant. As long as we keep asking this question – "Is he nice, is he kind, is he helpful? Is she nice, is she kind, is she helpful?" – so long there are going to be surprises. So long we can be held hostage.

So the Gita says, atmavashyair vidheyatma. He hasn't brought others under his control. He has brought his mind under his control. She hasn't brought other people's minds under her control. She has brought her mind completely under her control. Prasadam adhigacchati. Such a man or woman is always secure, is always serene inside. Whatever events take place around, whatever action takes place around, there is the unshakable security, the inexhaustible love, which will help all those around.

And prasade sarvadhukhanam hanir asyopajayate. I will interpret it just as the Buddha would. In this state, where there is neither anger nor fear nor lust, where there is no possibility of my dancing to your tune or making you dance to my tune, sarvadhukhanam hanir asyopajayate. All sorrows come to an end. And over and over again, in the Upanishads, they will say, you cannot add to the joy of that man or to the security of that woman. Whatever you give – you give a million dollars, I shall welcome it, but there won't be any addition. You take away a million dollars, there won't be any subtraction from that joy and security, either.

And in the Upanishads, they'll say, *purnam eva purnam*. Such a person is always full. There is a special kind of cooking vessel – in the Mahabharata, called *akshayapatra*. *Patra* is "vessel."

Akshaya – “that which cannot be exhausted.” And Draupadi, as you know – I don’t remember the details – who was very dear to Krishna, whose mind always dwelt on Krishna, for whom Krishna was always with her, when a lot of spiritual guests happened to drop in at her place, hundreds of them, very hungry, to test her devotion to Krishna and to test how Krishna would rescue her, she wasn’t upset, she wasn’t agitated. She just went into her meditation room, closed her eyes in profound love, threw herself at the lotus feet of Krishna and said, “I am yours, you are mine. Now you tell me how to feed these ravenous ascetics.”

And it shows you the humor of the *Mahabharata*, you see. Krishna did not say, “Oh, they are used to sense control, and their palate is perfectly under control. They like losing weight. And they want their body to fall away.”

He didn’t say that. He said, “Here is this big vessel. And you keep serving as much as you want for as many as they can bring.”

And Draupadi had such faith in Krishna, she didn’t even open the vessel to see what is there inside. Is there enough? She had such faith, she took the vessel, kept it on a pedestal, now asked all the guests to sit down, repeat their mantram and start. And in Kathakali, the vessel is small, light, and Draupadi goes serving. The more she serves, the more there is. And all the guests join together to say, “You are one with Krishna. You and Krishna are one. Krishna and you are one”. The meaning of this story is not that you will get an inexhaustible supply of eggplant parmesan. That you will get an inexhaustible supply of patience, of security, of love, of courage, of the desire to serve and help, when you unify your desires on Krishna. *Akshaya patra*.

THE SPACE BETWEEN THOUGHTS

February 17, 1979, Part Two

My particular field happens to be the mind. And as far as I am concerned, I do not have the slightest doubt that the turmoil of the mind can cause serious illness, can adversely affect all the vital organs.

See, in India, every doctor who comes – M.D. or M.S. or whatever they are (M.S. is surgeon) – the first thing they do is take your pulse. And the moment you are getting excited, feel your pulse. And you'll see what is happening to your circulation. The moment you are excited, count your breathing. And people who are very observant of their bodies, they complain of all kinds of creepy sensations on the skin. There are people who won't be able to swallow saliva when they get excited. People, their eyes get dilated, their gestures all get fast, movements all get fast. Some people talk fast. Other people are not able to talk at all. So the signs vary. But what is important to remember is the thinking process is getting faster. And I think we can all help ourselves by remembering the Buddha's marvelous way of describing the thinking process.

The Buddha is of the opinion that thoughts are disconnected really, disparate. This idea that there is a continuity in the thinking process, the Buddha would say, is a superstition. And if we can grasp this intellectually, it may again give us some helpful clues that the thinking process can be changed. It is when we think of the thinking process as a long bamboo, that we say, "How can we change this? It is a bamboo that is about twenty feet long. It's one big bamboo with which we can hit people." And that's what angry people do when they talk. They have got their bamboo in their hand and they try to hit you.

But at that time, if you can remember that that's not a bamboo. That is a disconnected series of bamboo-thoughts. And this is the beginning of detachment, when one thought – when somebody says your intelligence, your IQ is negligible, I have never understood why anybody should be bothered about this. I've had – being in the academic world, you know – very stern complaints after these I.Q. tests and some of these so called educational aptitude tests, students coming and saying, "My I.Q. has been considered to be minimal." I said, "What does it matter?"

Because, what matters in life is not I.Q. . What matters in life is W.Q., will quotient. You may have the I.Q. of a genius. What is it - 300, is it? 150? About that. You may have that and yet you may not be able to give up smoking. You may have the I.Q. of 200, you may not be able to give up alcohol. And you may have an I.Q. of 300. Everybody says you are going to improve on the theory of relativity and you're going to write the thirty-eighth play in Shakespeare, the sequel to *Romeo and Juliet* - what happens to Romeo and Juliet after they get married and settle down in Verona.

Where Romeo says, "Why did I ever go to that dance?"

And Juliet says, “That friar, he should have warned me!”

Now, you may be able to do all that. But with 300, if the person cannot reduce his self-will, bring down her self-will, life is going to be miserable, not only for him and for her but for all those who come in contact with her. That’s the question the Buddha asks, the Gita asks.

And interestingly enough, when your will quotient goes up, you can study as long as you like. You can study with concentration. You can get A+ all the time. And after the finals are over, you can just forget all that you’ve learned at school, which is not likely to be of any importance afterwards.

So you are told that your I.Q. is marginal. And that – see, this one touches the other one – and says “You are ineffective.”

And this touches the other one and says, “You will not be able to impress anybody at all.”

This touches the other one and says, “Why don’t you get angry. Just get angry at everybody. They will give you attention.”

And the next one says, “Make your body sick.”

Now what the Buddha is trying to point out is really brilliant. He says, actually, there’s no connection there at all.

I wish I had five lemons, you see, and if you can stop the . . . See it’s like . . . Have about 50 lemons, and make a bamboo of it, just a big lemon bamboo. And if you push the first lemon, the last lemon would move out. What the Buddha is saying is, you have only to slow the thinking process down.

Don’t you see the utter simplicity of it? I think I have heard that some of the greatest discoveries in science are noted for their simplicity. And here is one of the greatest discoveries about the mind – noted for its utter simplicity. He doesn’t say, “Throw these lemons at people! Pelt them with it! Eat them! Drink them!”

What he says is, just set them apart. Don’t keep them close by. Instead of keeping them in contact with each other, just put a reasonable distance between them, six inches. And you can touch the first lemon: the last one says, “It doesn’t bother me.” That’s the principle in the conquest of what the Buddha calls sorrow. And in the slowing down of the thinking process, you get control, absolute control.

If somebody does say to you, “Your I.Q. is marginal.” For one thing, this kind of detachment enables you to look at the body with detachment.

I am now giving you a personal confession. In my high school days, I was not a very brave boy and I never wanted to be a brave boy in the sense in which I saw brave boys behaving. Violence was never to me a sign of bravery. And my teacher taught me from very early days that anybody who uses violence is a coward. And it doesn't matter to me whether it is done by nations or races or individuals. Whoever uses violence is a coward.

And in our *Gandhi the Man* you'll see the statement made by Gandhi, that the person who carries a weapon is a coward. So, when I would go to school, there were a few fellows in my village, who were much stronger than I was physically and who were much more violent than I could possibly be. And I had another cousin about whom I must have told you. He liked such people. He liked to meet such people. He enjoyed provoking such people. He would go out of his way. When anybody said, “There is trouble along that lane,” that's the lane along which he'll go. And he will stop in front of those people, give them a chance to say something to him. And, this is the interesting part, he never got into trouble. Nobody ever said anything to him. Nobody ever tried to cause him trouble.

Now I was in the other extreme. If somebody told me that down that road, Cerini Road, there were unpleasant fellows, I would have my walk this way, towards the Coast Guard Center. If somebody told me that there were ruffians on that road, I would have my walk up to the lagoon. And I never got into trouble also. And my cousin, later on, when he became a big shot, he said, “You saved a lot of energy.”

And, see, one of the unpleasant things they used to say, making remarks about your personal appearance – this is considered to be very offensive in Kerala. They will start with your hair. And even, unfortunately, in those days, the simile that was always used about my hair was that it was a crow's nest. You know, in a crow's nest, you can see the crow.

And every day, you see, when I am passing by, somebody will say, “Caw, caw.” You couldn't say anything to anybody. After all, it's a free village. Anybody can say Caw, caw. It used to upset me. Just this very same thing. They say, “Caw, caw” wherever you go. And some people say . . . And see, I didn't know what to do. And one day, when things really went too far, both appealing to my ears as well as my eyes, you see, I came home and told my Granny. I seldom used to complain to her, particularly about others.

And she got terribly displeased. And, of course, she said, “There are two ways in which we can solve this problem.”

She said, “You can tackle them yourself, or I can tackle them myself.”

I said, “Granny, you please tackle them.”

And she said something to those fellows – which Christine only knows – which nearly made them leave my village. And she told me – see, this is what I mean by the enormous faith in her words – she said something very sweet. She said, “You’re a good-looking boy.” She was never in the habit of giving too much praise. And just as she wouldn’t criticize easily, she wouldn’t praise easily also. And when I went [to school] on the following day, it didn’t mean anything to me. You say, “Caw, caw.”

This is what happens when our minds can be reassured by somebody who loves us very deeply. And you’ll find, even in a very small way, trying to follow in the footsteps of my teacher, when I say something very sweet to Jessica or Julia or, in my own bantering way, to Joshua, it’s the same sweetness expressing itself rather differently. It reassures. It strengthens. And you may be sure it’s not an exaggeration. When this kind of security comes in, that you can solve your problems, you can change your thinking process, you can make your mind secure and you can win friendship, love, and respect. Everybody can win love and respect. And it is so obvious that you have to repeat it many, many times today. It is kindness that wins love and respect. It is goodness that wins love and respect. It is love that wins love and respect. It is respect that wins love and respect.

And one of the quotations that I gave you last night about Einstein – when one of his closest friends was asked, “What is it that you remember most about him?” he didn’t say, “His marvelous genius.”

“What is it that impresses you most?” He didn’t say, “His contribution to science.” He said, “His unflinching kindness to all.” That kindness was not born of weakness. That kindness was born of strength. And this is where my teacher illustrated from her own life. It is the strong person who is kind. It is the strong person who is patient. It is the strong person who will stand by you through thick and thin. And it is the strong person who loves you so much that at times, he’ll rap you on your knuckles. And this kind of strength, inward strength, I agree very much with Norman Cousins, can relieve many physical problems, can lead to far-reaching solutions of emotional problems. And this, of course, has to be accompanied by proper food, proper exercise, proper sleep and, most important, the sense, the awareness that our life has meaning, that it has significance, that it is a contribution to the welfare of all those around us.

[Part Two]

Sarvaduḥkhanam hanīh jayate. And the Gita doesn’t say it relieves your sorrows. It says it’ll put an end to all your sorrows. And when I heard this over and over again from my teacher, gradually I came to have such an immense desire to put an end to all my sorrows and help all those who would practice meditation and the allied disciplines to put an end to all their sorrows. This deep desire is below all other desires. And, as I keep saying, I have all the normal,

human desires that everybody has. But, in my case, I can transform them at will. Instead of just being greedy for my own personal joy, I am greedy for the joy of everybody here.

And *prasanna chetaso hyashu buddhih paryavatishthate*. *Prasanna* is again a marvelous word. *Prasanna* – joyful, always joyful, always loving, always tender, always secure. This is what real romance means – being with someone who is always joyful, who is always secure, who is always loving, who is always aware of your needs. This is the basis of all true loving relationships.

And, *prasanna*, whose face shines with this, whose life shines with this, because *buddhih paryavatishthate*. Such a person's discrimination never fails, is always there. Under no circumstances will the mind get agitated, will self-will get inflated, judgment be wrong. And discrimination, as you know, is the meaning of the name of Swami Vivekananda. And in our modern world, where there is so much inflated self-will, along with very high gifts, intellectual gifts, artistic gifts, creative gifts, scientific gifts, there is such utter lack of discrimination. And the Gita says, *buddhih paryavatishthate*. If you want to love all, to love the Lord in all, to be secure always, then, your discrimination must burn like a flame always.

Yatha dipo nivatastho nengate smrita. Just as the flame of a lamp kept in a windless place never flickers, so must your discrimination never flicker at any time, in whatever circumstances you may be placed.

Now let us continue with the verse here:

*Yo nibbanatho vanadhimutto vanamutto vanam eva dhavati.
Tam puggalam eva passatha mutto bandhanam eva dhavati.*

He is a very penetrating observer of human foibles, with great love in his heart, with great compassion in his mind. Just as a skillful physician is a very good observer of the patient. Remember the distinguished heart specialists from San Francisco? The way they began to move near their diagnosis was looking at the way people were seated in the chair, the way the sofas were getting worn out. And I was watching at the movie today that we saw, how, when tension mounted – which was most of the time – people would edge forward and hold like that, you see.

Now, it's all right doing this at a movie, particularly when it's a Sherlock Holmes story. But imagine doing it in life. And there are a lot of people who go through life like this – edge-of-the-seat, clutching the arms of the seat, ready to fall at the slightest push by circumstances.

And the Buddha now, therefore, is a very close observer of the human scene. He says, here is somebody whom I have helped to solve one serious problem. And he says, "I have just got him out of the jungle. He comes out and then runs straight into the next jungle." In other words,

once we have dealt with a samskara successfully, we should finish with the samskara. It is done with, we don't go seeking for a similar situation, say, "Looking for a lost samskara - did you find it anywhere, Brian?" This is where the Buddha says, when you have come out of one forest, don't go and enter another forest.

And to conclude on a personal note, as a Boy Scout, I made one expedition into a real forest. Not this little clump of lonely trees that you call a forest here, but a real, dense, tropical forest where there were elephants, where there were tigers. And we went on a Boy Scout camping trip - green turban, tenderfoot badge, shoulder straps. And see, it was my first exposure to a tropical forest. We were all looking for elephants and everybody was keeping a very keen ear for the trumpeting of the elephant, which we could recognize, or for the roaring of the tiger, which we could recognize.

But nobody thought there would be billions of leeches. And see, from every tree, as soon as we nice boys at a nice age - teenagers with nice skin, plenty of blood - we just walked through. All the leeches said, "Here is an unexpected picnic. Jump on them!" They started dropping on us by hundreds, you see. And within about an hour, we must have collected hundreds and hundreds of leeches. And nobody had trained us in our scouting course how to deal with leeches.

We asked our scout master. He said, "Look at me. Don't ask me. Look at me." And there was nothing that we could do. And I think somebody, probably this cousin of mine, I am not sure - he was very good in such emergencies. He said, "Let us go back and there's a very big river flowing close by" - between this particular place and my village, which was in flood. And every one of us jumped in the river. The waters were flowing fast. We were saying, "Faster, faster." And we probably spent about three or four hours in that river, and I am glad to say it worked. We got out of the river and had a meal which probably nearly sent into bankruptcy the man who had offered his hospitality to us. He is on our mailing list.

Now, this is what happens in life. Don't let millions of little leeches jump on you. You just can't get rid of them. And if you go and ask anybody, "Please help me," they'll say, "What about me?" And this is to show that the life beautiful is made of correcting innumerable little mistakes - a harsh word here, an unkind knock there, a satirical crack here, a sarcastic rebuke there, a little forgetfulness of another person's needs here, little more remembrance of one's own unnecessary needs here. It is in correcting these millions of little things that you get rid of those awful leeches, even the thought of which now I don't want to have. Fortunately, they can't come to me in my sleep tonight - I'll say, "No, you just stay in that forest and fall on all the grass below."

And keep repeating the mantram, draw upon the power released in your meditation and set right these little things from morning till night, and you'll find, as the Buddha says, you'll be free of all ailments and attain the state of aroga.

TERMS AND REFERENCES

aroga Freedom from disease; health.

A brand plucked from the burning A biblical phrase meaning “a sinner saved from the fire.”

Bhagavad Gita [Bhagavat “Lord” gita “song”] The “Song of the Lord” is Hinduism’s best-known scripture and one of India’s greatest gifts to the world, a masterpiece of world poetry on which countless mystics have drawn for daily practical guidance. Composed sometime between the fifth and second centuries b.c.e., it has the character of an Upanishad, inserted into the epic Mahabharata just before the outset of a devastating dynastic war. Against this background the teaching of the Gita unfolds, couched as a dialogue between Sri Krishna, a divine incarnation, and his friend and disciple Arjuna, a warrior prince who represents anyone trying to live a spiritual life in the midst of worldly activity and conflict. Part of Mahatma Gandhi’s genius was to interpret the Gita’s teachings as a manual for selfless action in a world of conflict, where the battle that forms its background is essentially the “war within”: the struggle between selfishness and selflessness in the depths of human consciousness.

Buddha “One who is awake” – the title given to prince Siddhartha Gautama (c. 563–483 b.c.e.) after he attained illumination. The pampered and sheltered prince had renounced his kingdom, a small principality in the foothills of the Himalayas, to learn how to overcome disease, decay, and death. His story is one of the paradigmatic narratives of transformation in the annals of world mysticism, a template of the human spirit.

Cerini Road Road located near the Blue Mountain Center in California.

Christine Eknath Easwaran’s wife.

Cousins, Norman (1912–1990) American writer.

Draupadi Character in the Mahabharata, an ancient Indian epic. In one episode, Krishna provides her with an akshaya patra, a vessel that will provide an endless supply of food at each meal until Draupadi has eaten her own serving.

The End of Sorrow Title of the first volume of *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living* by Eknath Easwaran.

Gandhi Gandhi(ji), Mahatma (1869–1948) Mohandas K. Gandhi (Mahatma means “great soul”) was born in British India and led his country to freedom through a thirty-year struggle based completely on nonviolence. His formulation of satyagraha (“holding to truth”) as a systematic method for transforming conflict into unity among individuals, communities, and nations, is one of the inspired innovations of the twentieth century. His daily guidebook was the *Bhagavad Gita*, a core scripture of Hinduism, which he translated into his life. When he fell to an assassin’s bullet in January 1948, Albert Einstein was among the millions around the world who mourned, saying, “Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon the earth.” Gandhi’s own estimation of himself was characteristically different: “I have not the slightest doubt that any man or woman can achieve what I have, if he or she would make the same effort and cultivate the same hope and faith.” Eknath Easwaran met Gandhi at his ashram.

Gandhi the Man Title of Eknath Easwaran’s book describing Gandhi’s personal transformation.

Gita Short for *Bhagavad Gita*, a central sacred text of India, on which 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.

Granny Eknath Easwaran’s grandmother, his spiritual teacher.

Iago Villain of Shakespeare’s tragedy *Othello*.

Kathakali The dance drama of Kerala that is based on stories from Hindu epics.

Kerala Easwaran’s home state in South India.

Krishna In Hinduism, the Lord of Love who dwells in the hearts of all.

Mahabharata An epic of ancient India.

Mantram Handbook A book by Eknath Easwaran, published by Nilgiri Press.

Meditation manual Eknath Easwaran's basic book of instruction in how to meditate.

tanha [the Pali form of trishna "thirst"] The Buddha's term for the insatiable desire which arises with self-will.

Pali A language derived from Sanskrit; the sacred language of Buddhism.

sadhana A body of disciplines or way of life which leads to the supreme goal of Self-realization.

samskara A firmly established habit of thought and action, usually negative.

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) Disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who came to the U.S. in the 19th century.

VERSES

Yatha dipo nivatastho nengate sopama smrita
Yogino yatachittasya yunjato yogam atmanah

Having mastered the practice of meditation, their minds are unwavering like the flame of a lamp in a windless place.

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter Six, verse 19

Ragadveshaviyuktas tu [vitaragabhayakrodhah]vishayan indryaish charan
atmavashyair vidheyatma prasadam adhigacchati
prasade sarvadhukhanam, hanir asyopajayate
prasanna chetaso hyashu buddhih paryavatishtate

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

Yo nibbanatho vanadhimutto
vanamutto vanam eva dhavati.
Tam puggalam eva passatha
mutto bandhanam eva dhavati.

Look at those who manage to come out of one forest of cravings, only to be driven into another. Though free, they run into bondage again.

Dhammapada, Chapter Twenty-four, verse 11

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