

THE TALKS OF EKNATH EASWARAN

27

Getting Free from Negative Thinking

&

Transforming Anger into Kindness

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 BMCM 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 e-mail 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 select the option of watching the talks with subtitles. After selecting “Play Talk” from the main menu, choose one of the options on the left-hand side of the screen.

If you prefer to watch the talks in shorter segments, you can watch one half at a time. Each DVD contains two 30-minute talks, each of which is split into two sections. After selecting “Play Talk” in the main menu, choose the section you would like to watch.

If your spiritual fellowship group wishes to watch 15 minutes of a talk per week, you can allot 45 minutes of your meeting to reading and discussion (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

The central theme of this month's study guide is training – the spiritual exercises that will make our mind fit enough and our self-will slim enough to face life's challenges with equanimity and compassion. In Chapter Three of *Conquest of Mind*, Sri Easwaran uses the example of physical exercise to illustrate the comprehensive training regimen he recommends for the mind. This week we'll take up the idea of stretching – which is as important for a meditator as it is for a runner or gymnast.

Reading: Training the Mind

Recently my wife and I took some friends to San Francisco. The day was beautiful, bright and sunny without being uncomfortably hot, and the air was so clear that we had a full view of the Berkeley hills across the bay. As we crossed the Golden Gate a light breeze was blowing, making the water dance with sunlight.

We went straight to the Marina for a walk. I like to watch sailboats under full, colorful sail, and I enjoy the birds – sea gulls, curlews, and the unabashed pigeons that come and look you straight in the eye as if to say, “What have *you* brought for me to eat?” But what especially fascinated me was a number of people running around the Marina lawns, stopping in turn at certain places to do a specific routine: jumping, bending, twisting, stretching. The city had put up exercise stations, it seems, so that men and women could come there regularly to keep fit. You start at Station 1 and do the recommended exercises; then you jog on to Station 2, and so on around the field.

I watched one man do an exercise over and over flexing and extending first one leg, then the other, again and again and again. I felt sure he had an objective in view; probably he was trying to develop certain muscles for a particular sport.

On the far side of the park, some other fellows were apparently trying to push their car to get it started. “They’re just doing their stretches,” my wife explained.

With so many runners in this country today, we are familiar with scenes like this. Everybody knows about warming up and cooling down and all the rest. But what most people do not realize is that the mind needs to be stretched too. The purpose of warm-up exercises is to keep the body supple so that you do not strain a muscle. If you go out to run when your body is stiff, every muscle will complain; the real race will be to see which one quits first. Similarly, if you try to work with difficult people – including yourself – when your mind is stiff, you are bound to get tense. Your patience may snap; your digestive organs may go on strike. You may

have trouble sleeping at night, and if you do succeed in falling asleep you may not want to get up. Meditation is warm-up exercise for the mind, so that you can jog through the rest of the day without getting agitated or spraining your patience.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

Reflect for a few minutes (not more than 5 minutes total) on your daily life to identify one area where your mind is “stiff” and inflexible. Where do you operate “on automatic pilot,” responding in a conditioned way to people or situations? Can you identify a habit of mind (called a *samskara* in Sanskrit) that regularly interferes with the way you’d like to be? A few examples might be:

- * Getting easily frustrated with people who don’t move as quickly as you do
- * A habit of being late
- * Frequently finding fault with others

How might you use the Eight Points to gently stretch this stiff part of your mind? Remember: just as physical stretching needs to be done gently and gradually, this kind of internal stretching requires a slow, sustained approach. What one small thing might you do this week to stretch yourself? In particular, when might you use the mantram more?

Reading for Inspiration

When it’s time for inspiration, please read the rest of Chapter Three of *Conquest of Mind*. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON TWO

In last week's lesson we started our spiritual workout with some stretching. This week we get down to some serious exercise: turning annoyances into opportunities for growth. It's hard work, but the reward is what Easwaran calls artistry in daily living – the feeling that every moment in our life has a purpose and contributes to the joy of those around us.

Reading

At each station on the Marina course, I noticed, the signs not only give instructions in an exercise, they also explain its purpose. "Do this to strengthen the muscles of the back." "This will help to flatten your stomach." Just as there are certain exercises for toning a particular set of muscles, there are special exercises for developing a fit personality. Every provocation is an exercise for developing patience; every opportunity to retaliate offers a chance to harness your passions. The question is the same as in a physical fitness program: how much do you want to get in shape?

Every difficulty during the day can be looked on as an exercise station like those on the Marina. Often the breakfast table is Station 1. It has certain mental bars and rings and stands, and just as the athlete I saw was strengthening his leg muscles, you can use life's inevitable annoyances to strengthen your love, patience, and respect.

Most breakfast trials arise from being rigid about what we like and dislike – which, incidentally, is the source of much of the agitation in personal relationships. "I don't like that job, I don't like her, I don't like this, I don't like that." Listen to people and you can hear this refrain everywhere.

If we live alone, we may not hear these notes of pique as the ego expresses its little preferences. But breakfast with family or friends is a different story. You like your coffee strong; she likes hers light. He wants eggs and you can't stand them. Isn't there a king in an English nursery rhyme who turned his kingdom upside down to get breakfast *his* way? "No one, my dear, would call me a fussy man; I simply like a bit of butter for my royal slice of bread." If the ego could be king, most of us would sound too much like this to be attractive. Artistry in living begins with learning to be flexible for the sake of those around us.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

Easwaran here makes an intriguing promise: “You can use life’s inevitable annoyances to strengthen your love, patience, and respect.” In the DVD we’ll watch this week, Easwaran gives a strategy that may help us in this very difficult task of turning annoyances into exercise stations for the mind.

He says that it’s possible to identify the nature of our thoughts, and exert some quality control over them. Returning to the factory image he used in last month’s readings, he says that the mind factory produces three kinds of thoughts: selfless, selfish, and mixed. Naturally, selfless thoughts are quality products: patient, kind thoughts that add to the welfare of others without even considering our own benefit. Unfortunately, those thoughts tend to appear less frequently than what he calls “rejects” – selfish thoughts that consider only our own benefit, even at the expense of others. Those rejects, he says, should be sent to the dump. In other words, we should give them no attention and try never to act upon them. But there is a third category of thoughts that constitute the majority of our mind factory’s output: thoughts that are partly selfish, partly selfless.

In responding to life’s annoyances, our mind often comes up with this sort of mixed-quality thinking. Please reflect on your experience and try to identify the selfish and selfless elements in the thoughts that come up when you’re annoyed. In these “mixed” responses, how might you use the Eight Points to add a little more selflessness and reduce the selfish element? In other words, how might you use annoyances to help you build your capacity to think more of the needs of others than of your own?

Watching the Talk

When it’s time for inspiration, please read the following introduction and watch the first talk on this DVD, “Getting Free from Negative Thinking.” Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

Our theme in the chapter we’re studying is training. In this DVD Easwaran – commenting on the Dhammapada of the Buddha – presents the skills that come from that training. First and foremost is the ability to leave behind negative thinking. Or rather, to be able simply to tell our negative thought patterns to leave. In Sanskrit, those negative habits of thought are called *samskaras*, which Easwaran defines as selfish impulses and negative emotions. Now, in his usual fashion, he is trying to make these intangible mental processes tangible and understandable, so he illustrates with some anecdotes from his time as a college professor in India. He even compares *samskaras* to unruly students, drawing caricatures and showing them to each other. It’s not so far-fetched! Sometimes we can catch our negative thoughts drawing caricatures of the people around us.

One of his stories requires a little background. In 1979, when this talk was given, our Nilgiri Press was publishing a *Laurel's Kitchen* calendar. As in any printing process, some of the products turn out to be rejects. Easwaran compares our negative thoughts to those rejects.

The two other fruits of mental training he mentions in this talk are equanimity – the ability to be calm and at our best in any circumstances – and the discovery of our noblest inner qualities, our original goodness.

LESSON THREE

We're making our way through life's exercise course this month as we read Chapter Three of *Conquest of Mind*. This week we've reached what Easwaran calls Exercise Station 2: our workplace. We're going to pay special attention to the underlying mental "muscle group" here – the faculty of directing attention at will. When we are subject to rigid likes and dislikes, that faculty has gotten flabby and weak. Our attention is dragged helplessly into a tight focus on the things we like or dislike, leaving us unable to adapt to the changing, unpredictable demands life makes on us. By strengthening our ability to direct attention, we gain the strength to move freely, as Easwaran would say, amid difficult people like ourselves.

Reading

For most people, the place of work is Station 2: office, factory, school, wherever you have to work with other people. There too the story is the same, for you don't leave your dislikes at home. When you walk in, the receptionist is clipping her fingernails at her desk again, and somebody is sharpening his pencil with an unnerving rhythm. Even tiny things can irritate: "Why does he have to sharpen his pencil like that? Why does she have to clip her fingernails *now*?" I am not exaggerating. When likes and dislikes are allowed free rein, any little thing can be upsetting; clicking nail clippers can sound like castanets. What an exercise for training attention! If you can get your mind off the Spanish dancing and completely onto your work, the distractions will disappear and you will find you have reached a new level of willpower, concentration, and flexibility.

With practice we can learn not to be bothered by life's petty trials, which leaves us the vitality and resilience we need when the big trials come. We even have staying power left over when we go home. Then we can say, "Sure, the office was terrible. That's just why I want to show you how much I love you." Anyone who can say that will be cherished everywhere. Nothing can disturb such a person's love or loyalty.

A friend of mine worked for years as a machinist. Machine tool technology can bring together very disparate individuals, and Ed found the differences trying. I reminded him, "Differences are only natural where people work together. You don't come from the same place or share the same family background. You had different parents, grew up with different values, faced different challenges. You shouldn't be surprised to discover you have conflicting ways of doing things."

I called up what little I knew about machine work. "Don't you have a polisher there?" I asked. "Sure," said Ed. "Several of them."

When you go off to work tomorrow, don't tell Laurel you are going to fabricate flywheels. Say, "I'm off to do more polishing." That is one function of the workplace that people never think of: it is a place where you can smooth and polish the rough spots of your personality.

"Smooth and polish," of course, is a nice way of saying there is going to be abrasion. This is not pleasant, I agree. But it can be highly artistic once you get the hang of it. Isn't lens grinding an accomplished art? A skilled worker can polish a piece of glass into a precise, powerful lens. Similarly, meditation can shape and polish personality into a lens that concentrates and magnifies the greatest of human resources.

With everybody at work needing more polish, of course, the day is full of opportunities for exercise. If you want to see how your meditation is going, measure yourself against this course. You can draw up a checklist: Station 2, the switchboard operator; Station 3, the staff meeting; and so on through the day. When you make a harmless statement and your boss gets irritated, that is an exercise station. She doesn't want to be unkind, but the teeth of her mind are on edge. Snapping back at her is like lying down in front of the exercise sign and saying, "I can't do it!" You lose the opportunity to strengthen a particular muscle. If the exercise is stressful, that is precisely because you need it. As in physical fitness, you just work on it a little; soon you will be doing it effortlessly.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

At the beginning of this week's reading, Easwaran says, "When likes and dislikes are allowed free rein, any little thing can be upsetting; clicking nail clippers can sound like castanets. What an exercise for training attention! If you can get your mind off the Spanish dancing and completely onto your work, the distractions will disappear and you will find you have reached a new level of willpower, concentration, and flexibility."

Please reflect on your experience. Are there times when your attention is riveted like this on something that is annoying? It is very difficult at that time to withdraw attention from it. How might you use the Eight Points then as "first aid" to get free?

Elsewhere, Easwaran makes the interesting connection between such moments and the mind's tendency to dwell on pleasant things – things we like. When we indulge this habit, it weakens our capacity to deal with things we dislike. Where in your life might you spend less time and energy dwelling on the things you like? Which of the Eight Points would help you do that, and how?

Reading for Inspiration

When it's time for inspiration, read Chapter Five (Living in Freedom) in *Take Your Time*. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON FOUR

This week we conclude our study of Chapter Three of *Conquest of Mind*. Our theme is “Slimming the Ego.”

Reading

To judge from the best-seller lists, millions of people today are interested in slimming down parts of their anatomy. One advertisement proclaims, “A flat stomach is beautiful!” For me, a flat ego is beautiful. A big ego has sharp angles and corners that stick out everywhere; we cannot get near such a person without getting hurt. But when you have reduced the rough bulges of self-centeredness to the bare minimum, you can jog through the day without stress or effort. When you come to an exercise you do it smoothly and gracefully, bounce to your feet, and run on.

The more we indulge our personal demands, on the other hand, the fatter the ego grows. This fierce drive of self-will – *I must get what I want, I must have my way* – makes us insecure, disrupts our relationships, alienates others, and lowers our self-esteem. Anybody who expects people to let him have his own way is going to have a miserable time in personal relationships. Even where beauty is concerned, I would say it is much more important to have a flat ego than to flatten any part of the body.

The exercise for reducing the ego is simple: put the welfare of others before your own. Pay more attention to their needs. In other words, go against self-will. Isn't that what reducing means? After all, if you have put on extra pounds through overeating, you don't expect to lose weight by eating more. You do the opposite. Similarly, when your needs conflict with those of others, the exercise is to try to look on their needs as your own. Often you will discover that it costs you nothing to yield – except, of course, your ego's gnashing of teeth. Let them gnash. You are growing, gaining great strength for facing challenges more worthy of your steel.

I always try to make clear that this does not mean making yourself a doormat, saying yes to anything people say or do. Putting the welfare of other people first is not the same as doing whatever they want. If someone close to you wants something that is in no one's best interests, or something which you feel is wrong, it is necessary to say no, respectfully but firmly. The point of this exercise is not to weaken good judgment but to reduce self-will: to become more sensitive to others' needs and less insistent about our own, which often turn out to be only rigid likes and dislikes in disguise.

For the adventurous, here is a special exercise for trimming away self-will: don't spend time only with people you like. Now and then, take a walk with someone you dislike; take that person to lunch. And don't always talk to the same people at work; cultivate relationships with everybody. You will be expanding your consciousness, pushing the frontiers of your world outward.

In every fitness program, of course, it is stick-to-itiveness that counts. You get nowhere if you exercise by fits and starts. Don't go out one day and do a lot of exercises, then get depressed the next day, go to bed, and skip the program completely. Keep on exercising, whether it feels good or not. That is how you develop a fit will and a svelte, attractive personality.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

The DVD we'll watch this week brings out the connection between self-will and anger. Easwaran speaks about monitoring our SWQ – self-will quotient. Please reflect on this concept, and see if you can identify the ways in which you might be increasing your SWQ by giving in to your likes and dislikes. How might this increase the likelihood that you will get angry? What opportunities do you have in your life to reduce your SWQ, and “slim down” your self-will? Which one opportunity might you start with?

Watching the Talk

When it's time for inspiration, read the introduction below and watch the second talk on this DVD, “Transforming Anger into Kindness.” Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

This month we have discussed the idea of “reject thoughts” – those thoughts which we'd rather live without. In this talk, Easwaran is focusing especially on one sort of reject thoughts – angry ones. He starts with the insight that anger is its own penalty, and he points out some of the less obvious forms of anger, such as the perception that others are hostile to us, or the inability to appreciate others.

Then he goes on to look closely at the anger process, as if beneath a microscope. He traces the roots of anger to what he calls inflated self-will – the thought that we must have our way no matter how it affects others. When self-will is inflated, it can't help but be violated, bringing anger. So reducing self-will is a key to being free from anger, which is very important for health and happiness.

Now we often hear the objection, “But how is it possible to be happy if I'm denying myself all the time?” In answer, Easwaran gives a wonderful account of how he

finds happiness in the happiness of others – in this case the cows and other animals that enjoy the coming of the November rains. He also treats another objection: “So if we don’t lash out at people, how do we deal with situations where others are taking advantage of us?” And finally he returns to our theme of training: “every opportunity for facing anger can be used exactly as an opportunity for training.”

Incidentally, you will note that Easwaran refers to jumping on a trampoline. For a time one of his forms of exercise was jogging in place on a rebounder.

Finally, since this talk is actually a continuation of the one you watched in week 1, it begins by repeating Easwaran’s opening lines from the first half.

GETTING FREE FROM NEGATIVE THINKING

November 3, 1979, Part One

This is the concluding chapter of the Dhammapada, which literally means “the spiritual path,” the way that leads to the unitive state. There is nothing new in this chapter, but every word the Buddha will say has a direct bearing on our sadhana. So please don’t be deceived by the simplicity of the words or by the repetition of the words because every word is meant for practice.

“Him I call a brahmin who has shed all evil, a *samana* who is serene, and *pabbajita*, a pure one.” The word *brahmin* as it is understood in India refers to the brahmin caste from which priests – and in the olden days, learned scholars in the scriptures – come. So when the word is understood culturally, or even literally, it refers to a particular caste. And even among brahmins there are various subcastes. For example in my village there is the *shastri*, and our friend who was the head of a great ashram on the Himalayas, Swami Yogeshwarananda, even today he is referred to by those who are very close to him as Shastri (Shastra is the scripture), “he who has mastered the scriptures.” And in this particular case it is very appropriate because not only is he a master of the scriptures as far as scholarship goes, he tries to practice them too. This is how I would interpret the word *shastri*: not only intellectual mastery of the scriptures, but also continuous practice of the scriptures. And that’s what the brahmin really means.

The Buddha now is using three Buddhist terms in Pali. One is *bahita*. *Bahi* means “outside.” *Bahir*, “outside, without;” *antar*, “within.” And you know, in Hindi schools, for example, village schools, elementary schools, for example, where children cause trouble, the penalty is usually the teacher getting annoyed and saying, “Bahir jao.” “Go out.” Which is exactly what the children want. And you can see with what joy they pick up their books and march out, casting a look of sympathy at those who are left *antar*: behind.

And the Buddha says, send out all the selfish impulses.

Tell them, “Take your samskaras and walk out. We don’t want you here.” And negative emotions, selfish urges, this is what we are able to do when we learn to travel in our unconscious. Just as in the elementary school within when samskaras talk among themselves, or draw caricatures and show one another, distracting our attention, making our outlook negative, we should be in a position to say, “Please pack up your things and leave.”

And the Buddha says, the illumined person is one who can do this. When we think about this in our modern civilization, it seems absolutely impossible. That is where the training of the mind, the training of the senses – day in and day out – by those who want to be able to do this more than anything else, they can command their negative samskaras, their selfish urges, saying, “I don’t want you here. Please leave.”

When I started getting more and more consumed by the desire to develop this impossible capacity – essentially through the love of my teacher – even when I was meditating, when I was following the allied disciplines, my intellect used to tell me, “This is not possible.” My intellect that had been trained for many, many years, used to tell me almost every day – which is what I mean by saying it is impossible – “This is impossible; you’re wasting your life.” And my ego, you know, always concurred. As soon as my intellect said, “You’re wasting your life,” the ego would say, “I agree with you.” And that is where some deeper desire, some deeper – what shall I call it? urge if you [like to] call it – used to turn a deaf ear to the intellect and the ego and kept on working, even knowing intellectually that it was impossible.

And I was illustrating it by a figure of speech used in my mother tongue: it was very much like writing on water. When I would start writing my mantram on water, my intellect used to say, “Absurd.” My ego used to say, “Preposterous.” But I went on writing. And one day, after many years of writing, I could read, *Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare, Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare*, which became imprinted on my unconscious.

See, this is what I mean by the teacher’s grace. Just as I received it from my teacher, all of us can receive it from our teacher if we get this desire to be able to walk in the unconscious without losing our consciousness, if this overwhelming desire becomes fed by all other desires then we too shall succeed in asking our samskaras – old resentments, or old hostilities, or new urges, or new conflicts – we can ask them to pack up and leave.

Most of these thoughts are rejects. We should have some kind of quality control. And now if you look at Shala, for example, as I was carefully looking last evening when I was walking about, there were a lot of you mailing the good calendars but there were a few calendars that would not be acceptable to our worthy correspondents. So there were heaps. You know, there was one heap saying, “Seconds. Help Yourself.” In other words there are some thoughts, some urges, that are not completely selfish. But they’re comparatively selfish. We consider the needs of all others and of course we consider ours as a little more important – so that is how we begin.

All that I am appealing is: Don’t consider only your needs. Those calendars go into the garbage. You know there are calendars where you cannot read the dates, you cannot even read the months. Some of the months are missing. So those are calendars nobody would give to anybody. And they are put in the garbage and they go to the dump. That is what we should do with selfish thoughts, “I should be happy whatever happens to others.” On that I don’t think we should compromise at all. “I should be happy, I should be satisfied, whatever happens to others.” And to those thoughts we should say, “We don’t have any room for you in our consciousness.”

But remember: comparative. Some consideration for others, a little more consideration for ourselves, pile them together and say, “Help Yourself” in the early days. There was a very interesting pile called “Make Your Own Hole.” I rather liked that title, you see. The calendar is

all there. Everything is just right, but in order to hang it up you have got to make a hole. And there are some people who are not even prepared to do this, you see. You not only must give the calendar, you must punch the hole. You'll have to go and hang it up for them and say, "There is your calendar." This is what happens to people who expect all the work to be done by others, or by their teacher. That doesn't help you; that doesn't help anybody. And I would therefore say, begin with some consideration for others, some consideration for yourself. And then gradually give your support more and more to consideration for others. Less and less importance to yourself. And when the great day comes, when your awareness is completely open to all those around and you have forgotten yourself – your comforts, your conveniences, your eccentricities, and idiosyncrasies – you can ask your negative samskaras to pack up and leave.

[Section Two]

When I was at my junior college, I told you that it was with freshmen that I was at my happiest. I remember by and large everybody was very concentrated on what I had to say, particularly most of my English periods were relegated to the last hour in a patriotic India. English began to be pushed towards the last hour when students are tired, their attention is wandering. And most English teachers used to feel discriminated against and used to complain. It shows you what a different attitude I had developed even in those days. I thought this was a great challenge. Trying to get the attention of those whose attention is wandering. Trying to hold the attention of those whose attention was difficult to be held. I thought it a great challenge and I would think about all kinds of anecdotes, all kinds of personal stories. And when once I asked them to write an essay on a day at college I was very greatly delighted when quite a number of students said, "We go tired and we go sleepy, but when he comes and starts teaching our fatigue falls away and we become wide awake."

But there was one exception. You know, the exception always proves the rule. And for a long time I wasn't aware of what was going on, but there was one chap who used to fall on all fours and escape through the door when my attention was right on the book. Most of them were attending to me so we weren't aware. And even when there was one or two titters I wasn't quite aware what was taking place. Then finally I became wise and instead of distracting the attention of the other students and humiliating this fellow who wanted to go back to a former incarnation, I pretended not to see it at all. Then he stopped. And years later, when I had become chairman of the department, who should come in as a junior instructor except this gentleman who had tried to crawl out on all fours. So I recognized him immediately. He came on two feet, *homo sapiens*, and then he gave me his paper joining the department and he was very happy that I was his old professor. But he said, "You must have been in close touch with thousands of students down the years and I'm sure you wouldn't remember me." I said [makes creeping motions with hands]. And I told him "If at any time you do scant justice to your work this is what I am going to tell all your students: [makes creeping motions with hands]." And I'm very glad to tell you he turned out to be one of my best assistants.

And gradually we can have such command over our consciousness that if, due to former conditioning, a negative desire comes up, a selfish urge comes up, they will go on all fours without even drawing our attention. We don't have to exercise our authority, we don't have to issue a command, which is what is meant by learning to walk in the depths of the unconscious.

The next is "A samana who is serene." This is also a favorite term of the Buddha: a samana. Sama means "equal." Samana here really means a person who has become established in the Atman. And one of the very simple tests by which you can evaluate your own spiritual development is to see how much equanimity you have under unfavorable circumstances. In this sense, for example, due to many, many years of continuous experience and due to an unending desire that everyone around me should be enabled to reach the highest, I can look at anybody, anytime and make a rough guess of where they are. I don't have to go into my library or my meditation room to read or to reflect. Everywhere equanimity, the capacity of the mind to function without ups and downs, is a very easy way to check spiritual awareness. In the kitchen, in the office, in the garden, on the road, at the clinic, in the bindery, at the press – everywhere – this is how we can check our spiritual awareness.

And take advantage of every opportunity, unfavorable opportunity, to guard the mind against ups and downs. Wherever you tend to brood on yourself, take something as very personal, you can be sure the mind is going to go up and down. And in meditation what we are trying to do is keep the mind from going up and down. That is what concentration on the inspirational passage means: where the mind is even, without any seesawing or, as you call it, teeter-tottering.

If during the rest of the day you let events or circumstances make your mind move up and down, you're actually undoing partly the work done in meditation. And see if I were to think about a midterm in meditation – with the help of one's imagination it's very easy to understand – to do something really to upset somebody and then see how much their mind sees and saws, goes up and down. If you're really well advanced on the spiritual path there may be a few minutes when your mind may go up and down, but you'll be able to bring it again to evenness because of your capacity to walk in the depths of the unconscious. Such a person is called by the Buddha, samana.

The next is pabbajita, which is those who have done away with all impurities. Of course in Buddhism this doesn't come out so eloquently as it comes out in Hinduism, because when you have removed all impurity, what remains is purity. When you have removed all selfishness, what remains is selflessness. When you have removed all hatred, what remains is love. This is the glory of the spiritual tradition, that we don't have to make ourselves loving. We have only to remove hatred from our hearts. We don't have to make ourselves selfless, we have only to remove what is selfish in our hearts.

I would therefore repeat over and over again: Please do not indulge in unkind words, in negative comments. And criticism, as you know, can be useful only when it is constructive.

Comments can be useful only when they are friendly. Persuasion can be useful only when they are loving. So even from the point of effectiveness I would suggest that unkind comments add to the problem. Unloving criticism makes the situation worse. It does not mean that we do not have to comment, we do not have to suggest. Very often we *have* to comment, we *have* to make suggestions. But it is the mental attitude with which you make suggestions, and the loving concern with which you put forward ideas sometimes opposed to others that makes for effectiveness. This is a very valuable art everywhere.

And I would therefore suggest when you feel that you have to make a suggestion – perhaps opposed to the other person's – take time to get a little detached from the situation and make the suggestion in a very friendly, very warmhearted manner, with great respect for the other person. You'll find that this works, that this is effective. And such a person, according to the Buddha, is gradually doing away with every impurity in his consciousness.

TRANSFORMING ANGER INTO KINDNESS

November 3, 1979, Part Two

This is the concluding chapter of the Dhammapada which literally means “the spiritual path,” the way that leads to the unitive state.

“Him I call a brahmin who is never angry, never causes harm to others, even when he is harmed by them.” Anger is its own penalty. And particularly where many orthodox religions are concerned there has been a belief down the centuries that if you’re angry the Greek gods will hurl their thunderbolt at you, the Hindu gods will strike you down with lightning. And in many of the old religious traditions you can see the angry people calling upon the higher powers to strike you with all kinds of earthly and unearthly disasters. And I remember when I was going to high school, reading a national anthem of a great country where one of the lines was asking God, “Frustrate their knavish tricks.” I am quoting verbatim. Just imagine Krishna seated in the depths of our consciousness being told “Frustrate their knavish tricks.”

And in understanding anger I think we can understand the origin of many diseases. And the immunity against many diseases.

Oh, this is an aside, interesting aside, to show how far away from these timeless values we have traveled. Yesterday I was regaling you with what I had read about Bob Dylan giving a very crowded program of songs in San Francisco, and there were more than two thousand people, old Bob Dylan fans, who had paid handsomely, fifteen dollars per head, to come and listen to him. And see, he has changed his attitudes – in my opinion – very much for the better. He looks at life from a very different angle from those days when he used to sing “Blowing in the Wind.” And something about Tennessee? Does anybody remember? Yes.

Now he sang – to me – some beautiful songs about what spiritual values mean for him, and I read a commentary today how utterly they were disappointed. The commentator approached many people and said, “What do you think?” David said, “I would like to ask for my money back.” And Julia said, “What is he talking about? In those days, what is he talking about?” See, she wasn’t exposed to Bob Dylan in those days because she wasn’t here. Now she is able to appreciate because she hasn’t heard any other Bob Dylan.

And the general consensus of opinion was that he has deteriorated. And I understood the commentators chagrin. He said, “He wouldn’t even say a good word to us oldies. All that he said was “That’s all for tonight.” It shows how much the audience needs to change. And it is very good for us to remember this anecdote very often that when we find others lacking in appreciation it may be that we are lacking in appreciation. When we badly want others to change it may well be that a change in us is called for. That’s an aside.

I would say by and large that the virus of *krodha* is much more deadly than many forms of virus that we see under the microscope. When we are getting angry – often it is because self-will is violated – there may be a few special cases where there may be other causes, but by and large I would say in most cases we get angry because self-will is violated. And the answer to that is to reduce our self-will.

As I said earlier, it is very easy to observe a person's self-will quotient. Just as you have IQ I would say SWQ, which to me is much more important to observe. And when we get angry, we don't get angry just with one part of us; we get angry with all our body and mind. It's a very interesting observation for all of us to make. When we get angry, when we get annoyed, when we get resentful, it is done with the whole body and mind. As a result, the mind of course is the first to suffer. But, over a long period of time, the body cannot escape. And many forms of illness – in my considered opinion – can be traced to this inflated sense of self-will which is often violated in the modern world. Everybody is encouraged to be self-willed; everybody is encouraged to be aggressive. And children, particularly, are encouraged not to hear “No,” are allowed to have their own way all the time.

So the lungs, the heart, the digestive organs, the nervous system, all receive the impact of this frequent violation of self-will, which – over a long period – shows itself as deterioration of the physical system too. So where we are getting angry, very easily angry, I would there again suggest: Connect it with your physical health too. Connect it with your emotional health and it will provide – or it should provide – sufficient motivation for us to reduce our self-will. And when there *is* a violation of our self-will to be able to be detached enough to return kindness for unkindness, love for hatred. This is the finest treatment possible.

And when we have to undertake physical measures or even use the help of chemistry – I'm all for it – but by and large I would say: It is in the reduction of self-will that we have almost a panacea for better health, longer life. And these verses can easily be the motto of any clinic. When our medical friends, for example, are thinking in terms of using meditation as therapy, using the mantram as therapy, using some of our spiritual disciplines as therapy, according to the needs of the person, according to the capacity of the person, they are not playing the spiritual teacher; they are playing the good physician, the good doctor, to help. Just as you recommend exercise today, you recommend birth control today, similarly we can recommend anger control. It is a good part of health.

And when you're getting angry, when you're getting annoyed, please don't indulge in unkind language. Please don't go and brood upon yourself. That is the time to work together in harmony. And that is the time to try to forget yourself in working for the welfare of others. This is a key to good health; it's a key to longer life.

[Section Two]

“Never causes harm to others even when he is harmed by them.” See, let’s start about the animals, who have been really celebrating the rains. Last evening when I was jumping on my trampoline there were five deer who were dancing on the grass in front. That is their trampoline. And to my eyes and ears they were celebrating the rains. It means good food for them, plenty of water, the cows and the calves and the deer and the heron and all the little creatures that abound here. This is a great celebration for them.

And I received much more joy from watching that – from becoming aware of the meaning of these rains for these animals and birds – than I would have received from any great personal pleasure. The proof is last night in my dreams I saw all these deer coming and really dancing around me. I saw all these cows trying to dance around me. They are not very light but they too were jumping about. They said, “That’s all. We are not graceful like the deer but we do our thing.”

And there was such joy for me, which is what awareness of the needs of all these creatures means. It’s not something that you feel only at a particular time. The rains, when the rains come, it means all this for you. Not just Gale’s cabbages. But it means the joy of all. This is what I mean. It’s a kind of total outlook.

“Never causes harm to others even when he is harmed by them.” Here we have to remember the wise words of Sri Ramakrishna, remember, about a man who saw God everywhere going and standing on the road when an elephant was coming down. And an elephant when it runs amok is a terrible sight. And one of the early lessons I had to learn in Kerala, or two early lessons I had to learn in Kerala – which shows you how practical my teacher was – one was to learn to swim. To go to school, when you come back the river may be in flood. You have to learn to swim. The second was what to do when you come face-to-face with a mad elephant. Just as you are taught what to do when you come across a racing car or – what’s the other thing that you’re all trained to look for? When a blowout happens. Just as you are trained to face certain emergencies which are not uncommon here, my grandmother made me aware of two emergencies that are not uncommon in Kerala: one is to swim across a flooded river and, the other, what to do when you see a mad elephant. Actually when you are riding on a mad elephant. Just as when you are riding in a car.

The other day somebody was saying: When you are riding in a car when there is an earthquake, don’t try to take shelter; just stay put in your car. But when you are riding on an elephant that runs amok, the advice given was don’t jump down. And hold on tight to the rope but wait for a convenient branch of a tree. It requires that you keep repeating your mantram and the mantram will bring a convenient branch within your reach and then you don’t jump. You hold onto it and the elephant will move away. I really like the artistry of it though I never put it to the test. But I had a few cousins of mine, one of them particularly used to look forward to this

situation. He used to say, after any procession, when we were participating in any procession, “Which is the elephant that is likely to run amok?” And he would get on that. People differ in our villages. And I don’t think he ever got into trouble because he perfected this art.

Now what Sri Ramakrishna says is the very best way to escape from this situation is: Don’t ride on a mad elephant. And that is what I would say, “Don’t get mad. You’re riding on a mad elephant. Don’t get angry, you’re riding on an elephant that is running amok.” And when you find your temper is getting frayed, your language is deteriorating, rush out. Believe me, how many times I’ve heard educated people, not only in this country but in India also, beginning an emotionally charged dialogue with “We won’t quarrel. We will give and take.” And “Let us confine ourselves to the subject on the carpet.” And within five minutes, you know, educated, cultured people: “What did you tell me in front of Wide World of Shoes that day?”

And you can see the absurdity of it, “It wasn’t in front of the Wide World of Shoes. It was in front of the Narrow World of Shoes.” Anything, to quarrel, to contradict. And, afterwards, it has nothing to do with the subject, it has nothing to do with the quarrel. They’ll go back and say, “You must have done this even in your elementary school.” “I’ve heard stories about you in your high school.”

And the Buddha is now saying, even if somebody is being rude to you, is being unkind to you, it doesn’t help you, it doesn’t help them, to be unkind to them. It helps to be kind, yourself as well as the others. It helps to show respect. This is something that all of us need to remember all the time because the more unkind you are the more angry the other person is going to be. And the more angry the other person is going to be the more unkind you’re going to be. Until two people have ceased to be two people and have gone back into a previous context.

Now not only can this be avoided, an opportunity for facing anger can be used exactly as an opportunity for training. Just as you learn to lift weights. You start lifting chairs, lifting tables, then finally a desk, finally baby Austin cars. That’s how in a small quarrel you learn to be patient; you get confidence. Next time when there is a bigger outburst, you – instead of retaliating, being unkind, making sarcastic remarks – you use it for training the muscles of your mind. And finally when you’re able to pick up any big weight and do it – what is it? Clean and jerk. You pick up any weight and then you throw it down. Now wherever there is anger, wherever other people are being angry, wherever other people are attacking each other, you just go in and say you are a weightlifter. Throw all your anger down. Put all your animosity down. And you take it, clean and jerk again . . . This is the influence of the person who becomes patient, who can be kind under attack.

And just as we admire people who are able to lift a thousand pounds, similarly we all benefit by being with somebody who can be patient under attack, kind when opposed and yet detached enough to state his side of the case clearly and compassionately.

So in other words this is not a sign of weakness; this is a sign of strength. And the Buddha concludes, “Him I call a brahmin who clings not to pleasure. Do not cause sorrow to others, no more sorrow will come to you.” That will be the theme of our next talk, the law of karma. When you are unkind to others, unkindness cannot help coming to you. When you are being kind to others, kindness cannot help coming to you. The Buddha says, this is our choice. You can be happy, you can be loved, if you make others happy, if you love others more than you love yourself.

TERMS AND REFERENCES

brahmin A person who strives to know Brahman, the Supreme Reality. In the traditional Hindu caste system, the word *brahmin* referred to a member of the priestly or learned caste. The Buddha maintains that the true brahmin is not someone who belongs to a particular social position or shows outward insignia of spirituality, but one who has attained stillness of mind.

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.

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

krodha Anger

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

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

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

Shala Name of a building at the Blue Mountain Center which used to house the Nilgiri Press bindery.

Shastri One who knows the scripture.

Swami Yogeshwarananda A Hindu spiritual teacher who lived from 1887 to 1985.

VERSE IN THE TALK

*bahitapapo ti brahmano samachariya samano ti vucchati
pabbajayam attano malam tasma pabbajito ti vucchati*

That one I call a brahmin who has shed all evil. I call a recluse one whose mind is serene; a wanderer whose heart is pure.

Dhammapada, Chapter Twenty-six, verse 6

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