

# THE TALKS OF EKNATH EASWARAN

## 28

*Breaking Chains  
Fetters & Freedom*

## 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 e-mail discussion group based on this course. Please e-mail [estudygroup@nilgiri.org](mailto: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.

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## LESSON ONE

The topic of this month's study guide is freedom – breaking free from the inner bonds that keep us from living fully and giving our best. In the talks we'll watch, Sri Easwaran refers to these inner bonds as fetters. Though they are not visible to the eye, rigid likes and dislikes are truly manacles that limit our ability to concentrate, to make positive changes, and to feel comfortable and secure with ourselves and others.

But in Easwaran's presentation, the process of freeing ourselves from these fetters is anything but grim. The chapter from *Conquest of Mind* that we'll study, titled "Juggling," is filled with a playful spirit of discovery. The best way to free ourselves from the chains of habit, he says, is to cultivate the confident or even daring approach of an expert juggler: "Hey! Watch this! Just see what I can do with what life has given me."

By the end of the month, we'll all have acquired some new juggling skills.

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### *Reading*

Some time ago, while visiting Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco, I saw an intelligent, imaginative street performer who billed himself as "one-man vaudeville." Everything he did I enjoyed, because it was so applicable to the training of the mind. Only in this case it was the hands that had been trained, which is much easier to understand.

This man was an excellent showman. He knew how to drum up business and draw in a lot of people who were wandering aimlessly about. Then, when he had a captive crowd, he started juggling – first with only one ball. "Everybody can do this," he assured us. "This is how you start juggling, with one ball."

And all of us said to ourselves, "Yeah, we can do that. Anybody can do that."

Next he started in with two – step by step, without frightening any would-be jugglers. And I said to myself, "Yeah, we can do that too."

Then he started two with one hand. The audience began to get thoughtful.

If I may make a confession, I was particularly interested in all this for a rather personal reason. When I was in high school I was a good student, and I didn't like some of the remarks made by other boys to the effect that

books were all I was good for. So I decided to learn to do something that nobody else could do. I looked about and cudgeled my brain. “Hey,” I said, “nobody is a juggler!”

I went to my grandmother and asked, “What would you say if I learned to juggle?”

“As long as it doesn’t take time from your studies,” she said, “it’s all right with me.”

So whenever I got a few spare minutes, I would take out a lemon . . . and then, after a while, two lemons. It was difficult. You have to time the toss well and then receive it well; the rhythm has to be just right and your concentration cannot waver. But I went on practicing, and to my amazement I succeeded. It was a great day when I went to Granny and said, “Would you like a surprise?” I started in with my lemons, and her eyes glowed with admiration.

That glow was so precious to me that I added another lemon. Try juggling with three lemons; you’ll see how difficult it is. But through perseverance and nothing more, I succeeded.

This time I called in my mother also. “Both of you sit down,” I announced. “You are about to see a really professional performance.” I don’t know who applauded more enthusiastically, my mother or my grandmother.

Now, it happened that at school gatherings, whenever everybody was hard pressed for entertainment, someone would ask me, “Wouldn’t you like to recite ‘The boy stood on the burning deck’?” This time I was ready for them. The next time the occasion arose I replied, “No, nothing intellectual. Real lowbrow stuff for me.” I took out my lemons and started in, and I don’t think I’ve ever seen a high school crowd so stunned.

That explains one of the reasons why I was so interested in this man’s performance in Ghirardelli Square. But where I had started with A and ended with B, this man went from A to Z. Some of the things I saw him doing I couldn’t believe. He would be juggling and would suddenly pass his hand right through the rain of balls, or pluck one out and toss it up behind his back. Then he would start juggling with an eggplant, a bowling ball, and a fresh egg. If you haven’t juggled, the impossibility of this may escape you. To be able to juggle – or so I had always thought – you have to have objects of equal weight. Only then can your timing be good. Besides, if there is

any kind of collision between a bowling ball and an egg, the result can be humiliating. But though we watched and held our breath, the catastrophe never occurred.

The climax was stupendous. First he brought out four empty beer bottles and placed them carefully on the carpet. Then he balanced an ordinary wooden chair on top of the empty bottles. I thought he was going to say, “Don’t you like the way I can balance this chair?” But instead he climbed onto the chair, stood up precariously, took out two balls and an apple, and started juggling. We all thought that was the limit; but there was more. While juggling he would catch the apple and take a bite – all in rhythm – and then send it back into the fray. He did this until the whole apple had disappeared into his mouth.

Now, if I had asked, “How did you ever learn to do all this?” he might have replied, “You started too. You just didn’t finish.” In other words, if I had dropped out of school and juggled for hours every day instead of reading Shakespeare and Shaw, I too probably could have learned to stand in Ghirardelli Square and do what he was doing. It is essentially a question of practice – and of where you choose to put your time.

What that young man learned to do with his body, you can learn to do with your mind. With diligent practice, you can learn to stand atop old, unwanted habits of conditioned thinking and juggle gracefully with anything life places in your hands. There is no mystery about this, no magic to it. You simply start by practicing with one or two small things.

This kind of juggling begins not with eggs and eggplants but with likes and dislikes. This is only for the adventuresome, but it makes an excellent test of spiritual awareness. Can you change your likes at will? When it benefits someone else, can you turn a dislike into a like? If you can, you have really made progress.

The reason is simple. The basis of conditioned thinking is the pleasure principle: “Do what brings pleasure, avoid what brings pain.” To act in freedom, we have to unlearn this basic reflex. We need to learn to enjoy doing something we dislike, or to enjoy not doing something we like, when it is in the long-term best interests of others or ourselves.

This is not an exotic idea. We set limits to the pleasure principle every day, largely because as human beings, we have the capacity to look beyond immediate gratification to something more important. Every good athlete

understands this; so does a mother staying up to comfort a sick child. This precious capacity is called discrimination, the ability to distinguish between immediate pleasure and real benefit, and I shall have a lot to say about it in the pages to come.

Conditioning, then, comes down to being dictated to by our likes and dislikes. And the first place we encounter likes and dislikes is when the senses are involved: with all the things we love (or hate) to taste, see, listen to, smell, or touch. Highbrow or low, almost everyone holds on tightly to sensory likes and dislikes. But by learning to toss them up and juggle with them freely, turning a like into a dislike or a dislike into a like as the occasion demands, we gain much more than a party skill: we get a precious handhold on the workings of the mind.

When you say no to a calorie-laden treat, or yes to a restaurant you dislike but your partner really enjoys, you are learning to juggle with your likes and dislikes in food. When you say no to music that stirs up old passions, you are juggling with your hearing. You can do this with all the senses. In the films you see, the books and magazines you read, the television shows you look at, the conversations you participate in – everywhere you can learn to say, “No, this doesn’t help anybody, so I won’t do it; yes, this is beneficial, so I’ll do it with enthusiasm.”

This is the way I trained my own mind, and I recommend it to everyone with a sense of adventure. Sometimes you have to grit your teeth, but the fierce thrill of mastery is exhilarating. It is not possible to convey what freedom comes when you can juggle with your likes and dislikes at will.

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### *Questions for Reflection & Discussion*

In Sri Easwaran’s view, life is filled with opportunities for freeing ourselves from our limitations. During the course of the month we will consider several ways in which we can recognize such opportunities for freedom, and learn to take advantage of them.

The first is the skill of accepting and enjoying what life brings us, whether or not it appeals to us at first. Take a few minutes to reflect on your life. Where are you held back by likes and dislikes? Where is your freedom limited by the feeling that you don’t like what life has placed in front of you? You may want to write down your thoughts privately, and return to them at the end of the month.

Now, let's explore the strategy Easwaran presented in the reading: "When you say no to a calorie-laden treat, or yes to a restaurant you dislike but your partner really enjoys, you are learning to juggle with your likes and dislikes in food. When you say no to music that stirs up old passions, you are juggling with your hearing. You can do this with all the senses. In the films you see, the books and magazines you read, the television shows you look at, the conversations you participate in – everywhere you can learn to say, 'No, this doesn't help anybody, so I won't do it; yes, this is beneficial, so I'll do it with enthusiasm.'"

In this excerpt he's implying that there is a connection between training the senses and thinking of the needs of others. In what way does it benefit others in your life when you become less attached to your likes and dislikes? What opportunities do you have for giving this kind of gift to the people in your life? What one food or entertainment item might you try to juggle with? What would you do to juggle with it? How might the other points help you keep the spirit of play and adventure that Sri Easwaran talks about in this chapter?

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***Reading for Inspiration***

When it's time for inspiration, please read the rest of Chapter Four.

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***Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.***

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## LESSON TWO

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This week we continue our study of Chapter Four of *Conquest of Mind*, entitled “Juggling.” In this excerpt Sri Easwaran closely examines the faculty of choice, following Gandhi’s insight that training the palate is a powerful aid in training the mind.

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### *Reading*

We can get so caught up in our subtle maze of likes and dislikes that we temporarily lose our sense of direction. As Spinoza says, we mistake our desires for rational decisions. We tell ourselves, “I like this, so I do it. I don’t like that, so I don’t bother with it. What other basis is there for making a decision?” What we really mean is, “I’m in a car that turns of its own accord. I can’t help going after things I like, and I can’t help avoiding things I dislike.” We have only to look at ourselves with detachment to see how much of our daily routine amounts to little more than going round and round in the same old circles.

There is real truth to an old saying: “The immature person does what he likes; the mature person likes what he does.” In the newspaper recently, three or four persons on the street were asked what quality they most admired in a friend. I would have liked to surprise the interviewer by saying, “Flexibility in likes and dislikes.” Its beneficial effects are immediate and wide-ranging: on our health, because it gives us a shield against stress; on our emotional stability, because now we hold the steering wheel in our own hands; on our relationships, because on most issues we can give easily, without rancor.

Flexibility can be practiced everywhere, starting with food. My friend Brian, who wrote the nutrition section of the *New Laurel’s Kitchen*, once told me that the thorniest problem in the whole field of human nutrition is helping people to change their eating habits. Even when they know their health demands it, change is almost impossible, simply because likes and dislikes about food can be so rigid.

Suppose, for example, that you have been looking forward to Belgian waffles for breakfast. When you come to the table and find blueberry pancakes, you feel so disappointed! There is nothing shabby about blueberry pancakes, but you have been dreaming of Belgian waffles smothered with fresh strawberries and gleaming with a crown of whipped cream. Many a breakfast table has been the scene of a small Waterloo over just such an incident. But on the spot you can start practicing flexibility, juggling waffles and pan-



cakes. If you have children, a few scenes like this will convey a great deal. They may not say anything, but they will gradually absorb a precious secret about life: being able to change your likes and dislikes means you are always free to enjoy.

If I may say so, I think this skill is much harder to learn for those of us who grew up in countries where food is very highly spiced. Just as children in this country go to the ice cream parlor after school, we used to go to a mango tree – even when the fruit was not yet ripe. To South Indians, green mangoes have a complex appeal: partly sour, partly sweet, partly pungent. And we had our rituals about how they should be eaten. One, at least for boys in my village, was that you should get your mango without climbing the tree. You have to take a little stone, sharpen it, and knock the fruit from the branch – and it is not supposed to touch the ground, either; you have to catch it as it falls. Then you season your prize liberally with red pepper and salt – everybody brought his own from home – and enjoy it right on the spot. I might add that our red pepper is not the civilized cayenne pepper you get in this country. Kerala peppers are flaming hot.

This is the kind of food South Indians enjoy. It should burn. Just imagine! So when somebody has been eating this way morning, noon, and evening for twenty or thirty years, it is almost impossible to change to milder food. Yet it can be done.

Some years ago a distinguished Indian scholar visiting this country was drawing me out about the life I was leading here. “I hope,” he said earnestly, “that you have made arrangements for getting Indian food.”

“Oh, no,” I said. “Now I eat food without chilies or spices, and with very little salt.”

He shivered visibly. “How horrible!” He couldn’t know that for the passing pleasures of red pepper and green mango, I had bought a lasting joy.

One of the first things I learned from Mahatma Gandhi was that training the palate is a powerful aid in training the mind. The reason is simple: you get at the mind through the senses, and taste is a double sense. Ask a gourmet: when something appeals to the palate, flavor and aroma are combined. So for those who want the taste of freedom, I am going to make a rather unpleasant suggestion. When you have the opportunity to eat some special delicacy which you like very much, choose instead to ask for something nourishing that you don’t particularly enjoy. Try it: you won’t like it. At first

it may make your skin crawl. Then why do I suggest it? Because even two or three experiments like this bring a heady sense of self-mastery. If you get hooked, you will see for yourself how much freer your life becomes.

Every day brings opportunities to practice this, as I can illustrate with another personal example. In India, as you may know, we use many kinds of vegetables in curries, but we generally don't serve vegetables raw. A tossed green salad is just a pile of leaves to us, and the only people in India who eat leaves are characters in our ancient epics who have been exiled to a forest or have taken vows of mortification. When I came to this country, consequently, I had some difficulty in taking to salads. My body needed their nourishment, but my mind did not understand that; I had to teach it. Today I probably eat more salad than half a dozen of you together, and I enjoy it immensely.

But the challenges didn't end there. The first time I tried asparagus, for example, it really tasted like grass to me. I might as well have been eating plankton. My mind objected strenuously. "This isn't food!"

I remember picking up the *San Francisco Chronicle* in those days and seeing a gourmet columnist announce with joy, "The asparagus season has arrived!" It struck fear into my heart. I asked myself, "Will it claim me for its own someday?"

"Asparagus is full of valuable nutrients," the columnist wrote. "So what?" my taste buds demanded. "What about us?" I thought they had a point. To get nutrients into the blood, you first have to get them past the taste buds. Mine stood there like armed sentinels, saying "No!"

Yet now – it is a real tribute to my mind – I eat so much asparagus that at my next physical examination my blood may prove green. Friends buy it for me by the crate. When I went to the store a few days ago, I was introduced to the produce man as "the man who eats all that asparagus!" He was duly impressed.

There is no struggle in this any longer. I don't face a plate of asparagus with a sense of conflict, and I don't force it down either; I enjoy it. With lots of nutrients and so few calories, it is excellent for my body's needs.

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## *Questions for Reflection and Discussion*

Sri Easwaran begins this excerpt with a challenging observation: “We have only to look at ourselves with detachment to see how much of our daily routine amounts to little more than going round and round in the same old circles.”

Take a few minutes to identify one or two food or entertainment habits in your life in which you have little choice, but would like to make changes. These are places where great benefit can come even from small changes, since the “charge” behind the habit is so strong. How might you start getting some choice in that area? How might the other points, like the mantram, slowing down, or putting others first, help you to develop flexibility?

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## *Watching the Talk*

When it’s time for inspiration, please read the following introduction and play the first talk on the disc, “Breaking Chains.”

### *Introduction*

“Breaking Chains” is drawn from a talk on Chapter 26 of the Dhammapada, given in October 1978. At the beginning of the talk, Easwaran presents St. Augustine’s analysis of addiction as an illustration of the verse: “Cross the river bravely. Conquer all your passions. Go beyond the world of fragments and know the deathless ground of life.”

Our negative habits, says Augustine, are essentially chains, forged out of our self-will, our desire to have our own way, to have things just the way we want them, no matter how it affects others.

The core of this talk is a penetrating analysis of how we can break the chains of those self-willed habits. Easwaran then moves on to one of his favorite topics: spiritual acting. The point of spiritual acting is not to deny that we have negative reactions, but to have the detachment to act independently of that reaction, until we can reestablish calm in our mind.

It’s a delightful talk that can remind us how to laugh at ourselves when our self-will gets inflated, and how we can act our way out of it.

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*Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.*

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### LESSON THREE

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This week we turn our attention to another arena for juggling with likes and dislikes: our work. As Easwaran points out in this week's reading, our predilections regarding work can be as fierce and inflexible as our attachments or aversions to particular foods. For that reason, it can be one of the most fruitful areas for spiritual growth.

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#### *Reading*

You can juggle with likes and dislikes about work in the same way. Whatever the job, all of us feel a natural desire to work at what we like, in the manner we like, with the people we like, and at the times we like. This happens so quietly that we seldom notice that our little preferences are making choices for us. Only as my meditation deepened did I begin to see that I was drifting toward doing things I liked and away from doing things I didn't like, without my even being aware of what was happening. Discrimination dawned with the insight that I was rarely acting in freedom.

One secret I learned was to try to see myself as someone else would. That enabled me to see with clearer eyes what I was avoiding and why. When you look at your life in this way, you soon find opportunities to work in circumstances that may not be to your liking – perhaps even with people you don't like – but where your help will benefit others. In such situations, most of us not only lose our patience, our concentration, and our good manners; often we lose our skill as well. That is the challenge. If you can only do well at jobs that are fun, what is special about that?

Again, let me illustrate from my own experience. For most of my life I have luxuriated in literature. I fell in love very young with the best from both English and Sanskrit, two of the richest literary traditions in the world, and I must have memorized thousands of lines of poetry; that was the extent of my passion. I carried Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* in my pocket wherever I went, and during the summer I used to go up to a spectacular, secluded spot we called the Glittering Rocks, where mica-sprinkled stones rose above the headwaters of our river, and recite aloud the whole of Gray's "Elegy" or the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam*. I mention this just to give an idea of the love I poured into literature, which I haven't lost even today.

Yet today, although I still sit up reading until late at night, the one thing I almost never touch is literature. Everything is medicine, science, political essays, economic analyses – with one or two exceptions, the most forbid-

ding stuff. Sometimes it turns out that the writer has little to say and little interest in saying it well either. At times like these, despite all its training, my mind still complains. “I don’t like this!” it says. “You have a volume of Maugham short stories on your shelf; can’t we read one of those for a while, just for a break?”

“Like it or not,” I tell my mind, “this is part of our work now. So let’s see what we can learn about emotional factors in heart disease.” My mind has learned to accept this answer without groaning. It has become natural, effortless, to ignore my personal preferences when it serves the interests of the whole.

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### ***Questions for Reflection & Discussion***

It can be very uncomfortable to work at jobs we dislike or to set limits to how much we work at the ones we do like. Easwaran is suggesting that the problem lies not in the job, but in our attitude towards it.

Take a few minutes to identify one type of work you avoid because you dislike it, and one that you like and spend more time on than necessary. How might you juggle with these likes and dislikes? How would the other allied disciplines help you gain freedom in these choices?

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### ***Reading for Inspiration***

When it’s time for inspiration, please read Chapter Six of *The Mantram Handbook*, “Overcoming Likes and Dislikes.”

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***Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.***

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## LESSON FOUR

This week we complete our study of Chapter Four of *Conquest of Mind*, entitled “Juggling.”

At the beginning of the month we reflected on what it means to accept and enjoy what life brings us, whether or not it appeals to us at first. This week we’ll reflect again on the questions: Where are you held back by rigid likes and dislikes? Where is your freedom limited by the feeling that you don’t like what life has placed in front of you?

The final section of this month’s reading gives powerful motivation for learning to juggle with likes and dislikes. The freedom this skill brings will enrich and strengthen every part of our life.

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### *Reading*

Even after years of training, I assure you, your mind will keep a few harmless likes and dislikes. That is its nature. The difference is that you no longer get compulsively attached to them. You don’t lose your capacity to enjoy life’s innocent pleasures; you lose the capacity to get caught in them like a fly in amber. In other words, you always have a choice. You can view your predilections with a detached eye, and you can change them, if necessary, as easily as you change your shirt.

Without this flexibility, likes and dislikes can become rigid and ingrained. Strong likes and dislikes lead to strong passions, which are an open gateway to anger. Just contradict someone with rigid opinions and see what happens; you could insert a thermometer into his mind and watch the temperature rise. Don’t you talk about a “hot temper”? A really angry person has a “temp” of one hundred and four. His mind is agitated, so his attention gets scattered: he cannot listen to anybody, and he gets stirred up before he even knows what the subject is.

I have heard some good American advice for such a person: “Keep your cool.” When you keep your cool, the mind does not flutter; it is still. Then you see everybody’s point of view clearly. You have the understanding to help the person who is agitated with you, and if necessary, you can oppose his views without getting overheated or apologetic.

Juggling with likes and dislikes, then, is much more than learning to be flexible about the relative merits of foods or jobs or people. The real issue is freedom. Our habitual responses in small matters reflect the way we respond to life itself: the person with rigid tastes in food is likely to have rigid tastes in other fields as well. All of these hold him hostage. He is happy so long as he gets everything the way he likes it. Otherwise – which may be ninety-nine percent of the time – he is unhappy over something. He might as well be bound hand and foot. My grandmother used to tell me, “Don’t ever beg from life.” Life has only contempt for people who

say, “Please give me two things I like today: one in the morning, preferably just before lunch, and another about midway through the afternoon, when I start to get irritable . . . Oh, and please remember to keep everything I dislike at a convenient distance.” This is panhandling, and we usually get what we deserve – disappointment, with a capital D.

We are not beggars, Granny would say; we are princes and princesses. We can learn to say to life, “It doesn’t matter what you bring today. If you bring something pleasant, I will flourish; if you bring something unpleasant, I will still flourish.” Once we have tasted the freedom of juggling at will with our personal preferences, we can face whatever comes to us calmly and courageously, knowing we have the flexibility to weather any storm gracefully. This is living in freedom, the ultimate goal of training the mind.

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### *Questions for Reflection & Discussion*

1. As a boy, Easwaran built up his juggling skills by starting with just one lemon, then two and so on. In the last few weeks, we’ve been practicing with our own lemons – first we juggled our likes and dislikes about food and entertainment, and then we added in likes and dislikes about work. Now Easwaran challenges us to juggle our likes and dislikes regarding opinions. This can be a shocking suggestion for those of us who don’t think of our opinions as “likes and dislikes,” so much as “right vs. wrong,” or “true vs. false.”

But Sri Easwaran points out the grand benefits of loosening up our opinions. “Just contradict someone with rigid opinions and see what happens; you could insert a thermometer into his mind and watch the temperature rise . . . [but] when you keep your cool, the mind does not flutter; it is still. Then you see everybody’s point of view clearly. You have the understanding to help the person who is agitated with you, and if necessary, you can oppose his views without getting overheated or apologetic. . . .”

Let’s venture into this arena, gently and playfully.

In what areas do you have strong opinions? Have you observed that your strong opinions can “hold you hostage?” How could you use the Eight Points to experiment with “keeping your cool,” and “seeing everybody’s point of view clearly?” What might be a playful, gentle first step in juggling with some of your pet opinions?

2. Here is a finale to our month of juggling. In the final section of our reading, Easwaran points out that flexibility is a *skill*. It can be learned. Juggling little likes and dislikes in food, entertainment, work, and opinions turns us into flexible people who can “weather any storm gracefully.”



Remember that we began the month with this challenge:

Where are you held back by rigid likes and dislikes? Where is your freedom limited by the feeling that you don't like what life has placed in front of you?

Has your month of juggling given you any insights into these areas of your life, where you are fettered by rigid likes and dislikes? If you can free yourself from these fetters, how will you and those around you benefit? What specific Eight Point Program strategies could you now use to begin loosening these fetters?

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### *Watching the Talk*

When it's time for inspiration, please read the introduction below, and play the second talk on the disc, "Fetters and Freedom."

### *Introduction*

This talk was given on March 3, 1979. Sri Easwaran begins by quoting the Buddha, who tells us that our selfish tendencies are like "fetters" or "manacles" or "chains" around our wrists. Selfish desires – for money and material possessions, for power, or for our own pleasure even, if necessary, at the expense of others – all make us their victims, breaking up our relationships and locking up our ability to love.

Now, in Easwaran's typical way, he softens the Buddha's severe image of fetters. Instead, he shifts the metaphor to the bangles – bracelets – that girls wear in village India. He paints a delightful picture for us of the bangle-seller who is expert at getting tight bangles to slip smoothly and painlessly over a lady's wrist. Our self-will, he tells us, is like a very tight bangle. He says, "when you look at anybody who has self-will you can feel compassion because you know those fetters cannot be taken off. If you try to take them off, they will scream in agony. They'll burst out in pain." But through the practice of the Eight Point Program, we can become like the bangle-seller. We can start slipping the bangle of self-will up and down by reducing our compulsive likes and dislikes, "by doing what is good for others rather than for ourselves." Eventually, through the practice of meditation, we will slip the self-will bangle all the way off, and then we will be free.

In the last part of the talk, Easwaran gives us a strategy for transforming our selfish desires – our tight bangles – into selfless, loose-fitting ones. He compassionately points out that all of us have desires, as desire itself is a form of prana, our vital energy. What he recommends is that we convert our petty, personal, selfish desires into an "over-powering, all-embracing desire to leave the world a little better than we found it." Easwaran then describes the transformation this



will bring: a kind of friendly, detached relationship with our body, because it is our instrument of service; and a joyous love for every creature because we know they are all children of the divine.

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*Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.*

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## BREAKING CHAINS

*October 14, 1978*

Let us comment on the first two verses, which really contain the main theme of his great chapter of the Dhammapada. “Cross the river bravely. Conquer all your passions. Go beyond the world of fragments, and know the deathless ground of life. Cross the river bravely. Conquer all your passions. Go beyond your likes and dislikes, and all fetters will fall away.”

Let us look at St. Augustine. “I was bound not with the iron of another’s chains, but by my own iron self-will.” You remember I used to talk about seeing that film, *Christmas Carol* in which Alec Guinness took part? I was not interested so much in Scrooge, but I was interested very much in Alec Guinness coming as a ghost, with a long chain dangling behind him. You could hear the clanking of the chain much more than the ringing of coins. And Scrooge gets startled. He asks his old friend, “What are you doing with this chain?”

And Alec Guinness – you know that very sly smile of his – he says, “What am I doing with this chain? It’s my own chain. I made it myself. Worked at it every day.” And Scrooge doesn’t understand, “Where did you get this chain? I didn’t know that after life they put people working on chains.” And Alec Guinness says, “No, no, when I was living. This is what I used to do. Every day in my home – by giving in to my self-will, by bearing heavily on people around me, by forgetting their needs, by focusing my attention all the time on my pleasure – I was working on my chains even in my home. Sure, at breakfast I had my chains put beside my porridge. And I’ll take one mouthful of porridge and then work on one link. Then when I went to the office I used to take my chain. There – at the expense of my colleagues, at the expense of my employer, at the expense of my clients and customers – I managed to find time for eight hours to work on the chains also. And just look at the chain, huge chain. I made it all myself.”

It went deep into my heart when I first saw this because this is what we do when we yield to our self-will, burst out with lack of sympathy against others, look askance at others, use deprecating terms about others, try to do our own thing at the expense of others, forget the needs of others by focusing on our own – such people are making chains.

And if such people had to fill in an application. Name: Scrooge. Profession: Making chains. Hobby: Making chains. Job applied for: Chain maker. When you are self-willed what happens is: You can’t be free. If somebody doesn’t do what you want them to do, you get angry, slam the door. What is it – that you don’t have freedom? And my suggestion would be when the application form comes, let us say, breaking chains. Training: Breaking chains. Profession: Breaking chains. Job applied for: Chain breaker. In fact the Buddha can be called the Compassionate Chain Breaker.

He comes and says, “Let me take off your chains, Stuart.”

“Oh no,” says Stuart, “oh no. I made it myself with the help of my computer.”

The Buddha says, “Try. Let me take these chains.”

And after persuading Stuart with great difficulty, he takes [them] off. And Stuart says, “Oh, I feel good. I am going to tell Sarah that if you take off the chains from my wrist I feel good.”

So let us try to remind ourselves every day – at breakfast, at work, at play, when being together with people – let us try to remember that it requires as much effort to make chains as to break chains. There are no chains for sale in the world of karma. You’ve got to work at it. If you want to be selfish you have to keep on being selfish. If you want to be self-willed you have to keep on being self-willed.

And the same energy, the same repetition, the same prana, goes into making a positive samskara as a negative samskara. This is another very helpful discovery that I made in my early sadhana: That prana is required for making a positive samskara through repeated acts, words, and thoughts. Then why not use repeated deeds, words, and thoughts to make a positive samskara? Every day, even if it is unpleasant, you try to be kind to those around you. Every day, even if you feel reluctant to put others first, if you keep doing it – even though in your mind you don’t feel very pleased with your behavior, even though there is a certain amount of protest in your heart – through this act of repetition, repeated kindness, repeated good will, repeated courtesy, repeated consideration, you are making a new samskara. And everyone can exchange an old samskara for a new. You remember the old cry in the Arabian Nights: “New lamps for old”? The same cry: new samskara for old samskaras. But you have to keep on working all the time at the new samskara of kindness, of consideration, of self-forgetfulness in the welfare of those around.

Here again it goes home very easily if we try to relate it to physical problems. Imagine, putting a chain around your lungs. We find it very easy to appreciate it. We do everything possible not to constrict our lungs even with a slender chain.

Imagine putting a delicate chain like that around the lungs. When you are self-willed that’s what you are doing. The breathing becomes affected. Imagine putting a nice, delicate little thing around the arteries. All these are not too far-fetched. Because self-willed people usually develop – gradually, fortunately – breathing difficulties, circulatory difficulties, and digestive difficulties. So, it’s very easy to understand this if we express it in terms of physical ailments. But it is much more serious than that. It will act as spiritual shackles.

Here, you want to climb the Himalayas. You have got your passport, you have got your visa, you have got your oxygen tent and you have got your gorp and you have got your sherpa from India to lead.

And the sherpa – are you familiar with the word *sherpa*? – he looks at you and says, “Hey, why don’t you take those chains off your ankles? We are not used to seeing people climbing the Himalayas with chains around their ankles.”

And he says, “Oh, I like these.”

And the sherpa says, “You should have stayed behind in the valley of death, Death Valley, and not attempt to climb the mountains.”

“The enemy held my will, and out of it he made a chain and bound me.” He’s using dramatic language. When you get very displeased if others are not kind to you, why don’t you get equally displeased when you are not kind to others? It is a very simple question which the Buddha would ask. You don’t like anyone to be unkind to you. You say, “Oh no, Compassionate One.” Why don’t you remember that the other person also is you? Just like you, he doesn’t like unkind words. He appreciates kind words. He doesn’t like being discourteously treated; he likes being courteously treated.

In other words there is no mystery about all these. In every relationship, for example, I find it difficult to understand that the person who usually gets upset is the person who likes extreme courtesy, extreme consideration. The realist, the mystic, oh, he says, the world is like that. It takes all sorts to make the world.

If somebody is a little unkind or if somebody is a little curt, I don’t get bothered. I feel sorry for the poor fellow. But the person who gets all agitated is a man or woman who will be very easily discourteous to others, who will be very easily inconsiderate to others. And it’s good for us to remember all the time, therefore, that just as we don’t like any attempt to treat us insensitively, similarly we should also be particularly careful about treating others also with equal sensitivity.

In order to do this the resolution is not enough. You’ve got keep opening your awareness to the needs of those around. There are people who are so caught up in their petty, private pursuits, so completely entangled in their personal prejudices and prepossessions that they don’t hear the voice of others saying, don’t tread on our corns. They’ll be standing on those corns and saying, we are not treading on your corns – while you stand on them. And in order to be sensitive to the needs of those, you’ve got to turn your attention away from yourself which is again not easy at all.

This is why I keep repeating one of the simplest and perhaps one of the most difficult pieces of advice: Put yourself last. The person who puts himself or herself first is bound to be lonely. The person who puts himself or herself last is bound to be loved, to be cherished, to be respected.

[Section Two]

I don't think anybody could have simplified addictions better than St. Augustine. When we read about all the addiction sessions and the addiction workshops that are taking place, where abstruse theories are put forward and concrete suggestions are conspicuous by their absence, St. Augustine says, if you keep yielding to a desire – once, twice, ten times – it has become a habit. In other words, if you do not yield to a desire – once, twice, three times, ten times – that has also become a habit. This is why I say, we have all the choice of samskaras.

To say that I am an angry person, you have to put up with my outbursts; I am a greedy person, you have to share what you have with me. There is a choice here – which is the development of a new samskara. When you do not do what I want, you do not behave as I expect you to, you don't give me your whole attention because you want to do something useful, I get angry, I get rejected, I get annoyed, and I am going to burst out. Now, when you have an agitated mind like that, St. Augustine says, you still have a choice.

Everybody likes acting. In fact, when I look at the Sunday papers I get amazed, you know, at the number of acting companies in our Bay Area. Berkeley has got about half a dozen theatrical companies. And you can't throw a stone in any direction on Telegraph Avenue now without hitting a budding Richard Burton.

Now if I were to say, "David, why don't you play the part of Orlando in *As You Like It*?"

David says, "I like an angry part because I am an angry person."

So I say, "We agree that you are an angry person. You don't have to prove it at all. But we want you to try to pretend to be Orlando."

And David, who is a great admirer of Shakespeare, says, "Sure, I can play Orlando. For three hours. After that I am going to be my angry self again."

You say, yes.

Then he plays for three hours. He is a great hit at the Berkeley Repertory. They sign him up, every day the play goes on. Sunday, two matinees. Saturday, two matinees. Then, say, during the summer vacation, why not have matinees every day.

And David says, “If all the people in the Berkeley area want to see me as Orlando, sure, twice a day, every day.”

And at the end of the year David has become a gentle person. He talks gently. He thinks gently. He lives gently.

It's not as far-fetched as you think because there was a man who played Sri Ramakrishna, who became very famous for that role. He was not a spiritual aspirant. He did not know how to meditate. He did not believe in the supreme goal. He did not believe that He even existed. He had dramatic talent; this is a fine role to play. And good lines. Very dramatic context. And he said, of course. Remember, he said to the management, I don't believe in this. I won't meditate. I won't use *japam*. I won't restrain my senses. But, I like being an actor. Calcutta is noted for theaters. Bengalis are very good at acting; they enjoy good acting. Being a Bengali, he said, I will act Sri Ramakrishna. And it started. He acted it so well it went on for a year or two and then other states invited this particular band of devoted actors to their profession.

And I think later on I heard the man had renounced the theater, renounced all the pleasures of the ego to become a real spiritual aspirant. This is what happens, you know. You keep repeating. After all, even here we have sometimes plays, we'll have many occasions. Now, we don't say: internally, are you suited for this play, Nick? Emotionally, are you in tune with this character? We say, can you speak your lines well, can you avoid bumping into people? Do you have a stage presence? We don't care what you feel inside as long as you do this. Now, if you keep on doing this – three days, three months, three years – the old samskara says, I am finished. The new samskara says, I am on. It is as simple as that.

So, please act, you know. I may have repeated, I don't like people being discourteous, because they are irresponsible. After all, you may be feeling discourteous in your mind. I say you are responsible. You may be feeling inconsiderate in your mind. I say, you are still responsible. But when you use discourteous language, I say you can control your tongue. I have gone to the extent of saying to somebody who says they cannot control their tongue. I said, hold your tongue. When you feel that you are going to say something that you cannot control, hold your tongue until the fit has passed. Somebody said – that person is right here – I cannot resist eating. I said, here is a string, tie your hand up. And loosen your hand after the impulse has passed. In other words we can all exercise a certain amount of control over physical action. But I am very compassionate when somebody says, you know, internally, not so good. Where our emotions are concerned, pretty bad. There I say, yeah, I agree you haven't trained your emotions. Your feelings, they are raw. Now, I'll show you how to train your feelings, how to train your emotions and that is: Act. Just try, when you are angry, seething with resentment and saying, Why does this fellow talk to me like that? He won't let me talk to him like that. That's what he should do.

When you are feeling like that, go to your mirror and make your eyes quiet. Just look at your eyes. Some kind of biofeedback training. Make your eyes quiet. You can ring a bell. Isn't that how they do it? Make your eyes quiet. If your nostrils are distended, do that a little. And you don't feel like smiling at all. I can agree. You don't feel like smiling at all. You say, Oh, I don't want to smile. I say, we are not asking you to smile. Just do that [pulls up corners of his mouth]. If you can't do it, do this. And I will support you. I'll say, he is making a new samskara.

On the one hand you have a sense of humor. And on the other hand you have a sense of great purpose, you see. After you have played it for about two and a half hours, three hours which is a period of time, you just get off the stage. And keep away from people. In fact I must confide in you that I have had a few friends, they would, after a certain amount of intimacy for a couple of hours, they would disappear. This was at the university. And after a few hours of very jovial and convivial behavior, being very nice, being very kind, they would suddenly disappear.

And I used to ask them, what's the matter? Why don't you stay on? "We'll burst out. We have reached the point of losing control. And that's why we run out." I say, I didn't know this. You have some self-knowledge, I said, but what I can do is, don't keep on running out every two hours. This week, two hours; next week, two and a quarter; week after that, two and a half. Maybe next year, three hours. And keep on extending your act. It may sound perhaps too far-fetched, but anybody can do this just by prolonging over a long, long period. You prolong it for a period of twelve years and you have become a great act.

Some of the great actors, you don't know that they act. I've had the good fortune of seeing one or two great actors and actresses and what astonished me was they were not acting. When they talked I don't think they were reciting lines from Shaw. They were talking. And gestures. I didn't think they were in the course of an Elizabethan play. They were talking among friends, sometimes among enemies. But talking naturally, spontaneously.

And this is what happens in the course of sadhana. All this careful, continued acting training that you have received on the stage of life, it becomes natural. And anybody can do this – provided you go at it with continued enthusiasm – which is the great purpose served by a spiritual teacher who shows in his life, in her life, circumstances may be unfavorable, people may be difficult, but the teacher is always on an even keel. His acting or her acting has become natural. Kind to everybody, good to everybody, because he or she doesn't think about himself, doesn't think about herself. This is why I said the two verses, "Cross the river bravely. Conquer all your passions. Go beyond the world of fragments and know the deathless ground of life."

So, we can have our meditation now.



*March 3, 1979*

When the Buddha says there are different kinds of fetters, he talks about iron fetters but he also says there are wooden fetters, which can be equally strong. And he continues, there are fiber fetters that can be as strong as iron fetters to prevent our free movement, to prevent our growth, to prevent our personal relationships.

When I open the paper everyday, including today, it is with excruciating pain that I read accusations by two people who are professedly in love, trying to hurt each other as much as he or she can. And it's all centered around how to divide property. And it is this love of money, Sri Ramakrishna would say, that broke up that relationship. It is good for every human being to remember that the love of money can really ruin personal relationships. If you talk to your friends from the olden days or members of your own family, I am sure that they will be able to attest from their own life and the lives of their own acquaintances how much the love of money has contributed to the disruption of human relationships.

To paraphrase Sri Ramakrishna on the one hand, and the Buddha on the other, I would say golden chains are the worst kind of chains. The Buddha says iron chains, I would say even stronger than iron chains are golden chains. And that's why Sri Ramakrishna says *kanchana*, the love of money and the love of material possessions, can take away from our feeling of respect for the other person, from our tenderness for the other person and imprison our attention on how much the relationship can bring to us in terms of money.

When the Buddha now talks about other fetters, I would say that the thirst for pleasure is a great impediment on the spiritual path. When I use the term "pleasure," it is the free rendering of *kama* – fleeting pleasure, just personal pleasure that one person should be happy, if necessary, at the expense of the other. How I would distinguish between pleasure and joy? In pleasure A says that A wants to be happy whatever happens to rest of the letters of the alphabet, A doesn't care. Now in joy, A says I want everybody to be happy from A to Z – in which A's joy is included. So this has got to be very clearly understood by every spiritual aspirant that what we are doing is not turning our back upon our own happiness; what we are doing is turning our back on everybody's unhappiness. So that we can include everybody – our family, our community – in our search for joy, for fulfillment.

Wherever we are able to remember the needs of others, forget our own pleasure in fulfilling the needs of others, we are freeing our hands from those fetters, we are freeing our wrists from those manacles.

The third kind of fetter which the Buddha here will include is the lust for power. The love of power is perhaps the strongest fetter of all. People who are lusting for power perhaps are the



greatest victims of all. If we reverse it, the power of love is the greatest emancipator of all. Here again, when you really love somebody, the thought of what you are going to get out of it will not be present at all. When you think of what you can get out of it, you are likely to manipulate the other person. When you can think only of how much you can give, how much you can contribute, you are really beginning to fall in love. When, for example, I try to say the words “I love you” to anybody, I try to practice it – to the extent it is possible for me – that no thought of what I can get should ever enter into it. This comes out of practice, and as we practice this more and more, we shall see the beneficial effects of this, not only upon others but upon ourselves also. The fetters will begin slowly to fall away.

Kalidasa’s most beautiful poem, *Megasandesha*, *Megasandesham*, or *The Cloud Messenger*, comes in very handy as an illustration now of the falling of the fetters.

The lady who is the heroine of *The Cloud Messenger*, she has been parted from her lover for many months. She thinks of him all the time. She misses him all the time. She hasn’t been eating very well. She hasn’t been sleeping very well. She has been – to use a Victorian phrase – pining away. The poet says *kanaka valaya bhramsha riktaprakoshthah*. *Kanaka* is gold. *Valaya* is bracelet. *Bramsha*, slipping over. *Riktaprakoshthah*, over the wrist. The bracelets—you must have seen in the film – the bracelets are worn rather tight. Now that she is pining away the heroine begins to lose weight and the bracelet begins to slip over [her hand]. And one of the occurrences in class, for example, when I was teaching freshmen would be suddenly somebody would be taking the bracelets back. As they had two or three bracelets, when they are being taken back, there is a very distracting jingle which can outdo any sonority in *As You Like It*.

It is self-will that makes it impossible for our fetters to slip over. Self-will magnifies the wrist. Every bone becomes bigger. Every tendon becomes bigger. All the muscles begin to get bigger. And the fetters begin to cut deep into your hand. And when our self-will is reduced, you can be sure – when you look at anybody who has self-will you can feel compassion because you know those fetters cannot be taken off. If you try to take them off, they will scream in agony. They’ll burst out in pain.

As your self-will decreases, you slowly begin to see the bracelet moving to and fro. That’s the first sign. Instead of cutting into your flesh now, you are able to see the bracelet – you can slip it up, you can slip it down. When your self-will has been reduced to a great extent, you can take the bracelets off and put them back on again without any difficulty at all. I particularly remember this image because in our villages in India – not unlike in some of the village activities that we saw in Kamarpukur or on the banks of the Ganges – there is no visitor who is more welcome than the bangle maker. He is called *chudivala*. In North India, *chudi* is bangle. Chudivala.

And the bangle seller, the bangle vendor, he usually travels with a load of bangles on his back. Have you seen them, Brian? He will have them on his back and as he walks along Main Street,

he says, “Bangles, Bangles! Red bangles, green bangles, blue bangles, wouldn’t you like to have these bangles?” He sings them along. In our village, from every home, girls will rush out and say, “Come in.”

He is not just a seller, not just a vendor, he is a long-lost friend. He comes. He is given a mat. Now you must be familiar with all these scenes. The mat is spread, and he sits down, lowers the big cascade of bangles gently by his side. And then the girls sit around him. He says, “Help yourself.” They try to select the color. And there are many, many varieties. And they are very inexpensive, so usually young girls have a big store of bangles which they change according to the color of the sari they wear.

Now, after they have selected the bangles, if they try to put these bangles on, it is very difficult. You know most of these glass bangles, they can be easily broken, and if they are broken, they can pierce the skin. So they usually select the bangles, and give them to the bangle maker. And there are many songs, where many lovers sing, “I wish I were a bangle maker so that I could hold your hand and put these bangles gently over your wrist.” It is a common refrain. I am trying to show you from what all images we draw our romance.

If you know the ways of the bangle maker and the scene that I have been talking about, you can very easily respond if Romeo addressing Juliet in the balcony doesn’t say, “You’re the sun.” But he says, “I wish I were a bangle maker so that I could hold your beautiful hand and slip these bangles over.”

The way they do it, I imagine, is some kind of hereditary secret. They’ll try to massage your fingers, which also has its satisfactions, so all this is included. And they try to slip the bangle over the wrist even without touching the skin. Sometimes, you know, some ladies don’t have small wrists, so it speaks very well of their skill that they should be able to do this. And I would say, isn’t it wonderful to have this skill by which we can take off our fetters, and take off other people’s fetters, without any difficulty at all?

[Section Two]

Here one practical clue that I can give from my own sadhana is: it may not be possible for many years to reduce self-will to such an extent that we can take off our fetters at will, because I am talking about compulsions. And it is as you go into the deeper stages of meditation that we really become embarrassed to see how many of our responses are compulsions. I don’t think I had the slightest idea until I took to meditation – even though I possessed some self-knowledge and I could look at myself with some detachment – how many of my responses were far from voluntary, particularly where likes and dislikes are concerned.

In the practice of meditation what I discovered may help everyone. When you begin to work on your compulsions, on your compulsive likes and dislikes – by doing what is good for others

rather than for yourself, doing what is beneficial for those around you rather than pleasant for yourself – the day may come as your meditation deepens, as the mantram accompanies you most of the time, when you really begin to move the bangles up and down. You know that you cannot take them over because if you take them over, it's going to break. And if it's going to break, it's going to lacerate your skin, it's going to pierce your flesh. But you know now that you can move it up and down, so you know in the course of time you can take it off. This itself has a very strengthening effect. This gives you confidence in tackling your problems. It gives you deeper motivation and it gives you the assurance that in the not distant future, if you increase your vigilance and if you increase your enthusiasm, you can be sure that you are going to take your fetters off.

The next is “It is wisdom to say such fetters degrade. They are hard to break.” Here again you get the toughness of the Buddha, the most compassionate of spiritual teachers, but who really expects everyone who follows him to be tough. And even in the Gita, the earnest spiritual aspirant is called *dhira*, really tough, inwardly tough, who can defy self-will whenever it is necessary, which means always. And who can discriminate when to yield to desire and when to defy desire.

See this is a topic on which I always like to wax a great deal because it is the very concept of freedom to me. Desires come to all of us. At no time in life will we be free from desire, because that is prana. That is vital wealth. I am consumed by desire to carry on this work for many, many years. And that's what I expect every one of us to be able to do, gradually, to be consumed by this over-powering, all-embracing desire to leave the world a little better than we found it when we came into it.

And as we develop discrimination we see that there are a few desires that have to be yielded to. It doesn't mean that you defy every desire. You start discriminating.

Now asparagus, you know, I never saw asparagus until I came to this country. I didn't know what it tasted like. And when you haven't tasted something you really have got to educate your taste to appreciate it. Now you can see. I know that asparagus is very good for my body, Carol tells me full of every possible vitamin they have discovered and will yet discover! And hardly any calories. And I take so much asparagus now that every time somebody goes out I always say, “Please bring some more asparagus.” And for me, this season, until the end of June, it's a kind of asparagus festival for my body.

This is not just something physical. You come to feel it in the mind, you know. And that's where, similarly, you can train your palate, you can train your will to enjoy everything that is good for the body. That's why I give you the example of asparagus.

Similarly, when we have the tendency to overeat, I think it is very bad manners towards the body. See this is a very different outlook altogether. This is not the nutritionist Brian jumping

on you and saying you are violating all the laws of nutrition. We say “Who cares?” But when I say, you like to have good manners. When the lady comes, you open the door. When the lady comes, Joshua gets up and gives his seat. And he doesn’t belong to the Victorian age. It’s very much like that, you see. When your body’s needs are concerned, you open the door and say, here is something that is really good for you. Take your hat off and leave it, and open the door and let your body appreciate your good manners.

And it is a very touching relationship that you will gradually come to have where you will understand the needs of your body, you will appreciate how steadfastly your body has carried out your orders, how valiantly it has followed your instructions in meditation, and therefore you try to give it the very best possible that you can have.

This morning I was watching a family of quails. They come close to the window and I enjoy looking at them and I am not familiar with quails until I’ve been . . . I have been familiar with them only after coming to Ramagiri. You don’t have quails on Lee Street in Oakland. And I’ve come to have such affection for them.

And there was a young deer who hasn’t seen me, so the little one was getting afraid. And the big deer, nine of them, they probably were telling the little one, he loves us, and turned their back upon me and started grazing, which was a vote of confidence in me, you know. They weren’t even looking at me, they turned their back and went on grazing. And it gave me such joy, a joy that continues. This is the kind of joy that will come to all of us when we see the cows. Now the rains, for example, is good for us, good for Richard’s trees, good for Mary’s flowers, but food for all these creatures – cows and calves and sheep and lamb and deer and every kind of creature. You feel a great joy that the rains have come, that all these creatures are well provided for, and your heart sings a paean of praise to the Divine Mother whose children all of us are. Just as among human beings, the same mother has different kinds of children – in intelligence, in conduct, in affection – similarly the Divine Mother has children with four feet, with two feet, children that croak, children that sing, children that mew, and children that bark. And she doesn’t have any less affection for all these children.

This is the joy that comes, that will come to every one of us and we’ll feel a personal sense of responsibility for every creature. Just now as we were coming there was a frog, trying to lie on that step so that I couldn’t come down. And even to the humble frog, I have such affection that I had to talk to him a little and say “Everybody loves you, especially the nutritionist Brian.”

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## TERMS & REFERENCES

*As You Like It* a Shakespearean comedy.

**Brian** one of Easwaran's close students with a great fondness for animals. Also a trained nutritionist and co-author of the best-selling cookbook, *Laurel's Kitchen*.

**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.

**gorp** a high-energy snack, typically consisting of raisins and nuts.

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

**Kalidasa** 5th-century A.D. Indian playwright and poet.

**kama** selfish desire. The god of desire or passion is called Kama.

**Kamarpukur** birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna, in West Bengal.

**kanchana** gold, wealth.

**Lee Street** a former address of Easwaran's.

**Orlando** a lovelorn character in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

**paeon** a song of joyful praise.

**prana** the breath of life, vital energy, capacity to desire and love.

**Ramagiri** the Blue Mountain Center headquarters. Also the spiritual community that Easwaran founded and in which he lived until his passing in 1999.

**Ramakrishna, Sri** Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886) was born in a small village in Bengal, north India, and lived out his days as a simple priest of the temple to the Divine Mother at Dakshineswar, near Calcutta. Yet he encompassed within his vast inner experience the spiritual practices of various Hindu paths, Islam, and Christianity. His message has been spread worldwide through the Ramakrishna Order of monks and the Ramakrishna Mission of humanitarian services. One of his householder disciples kept a detailed diary, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942), a unique record of the daily life and teachings of a God-conscious person.

**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.

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VERSES IN THESE TALKS

Cross the river bravely. Conquer all your passions. Go beyond the world of fragments, and know the deathless ground of life.

Cross the river bravely. Conquer all your passions. Go beyond your likes and dislikes, and all fetters will fall away.

*Dhammapada, Chapter Twenty-six, verses 1 and 2.*

*na tam dalham bandhanam ahu dhira yad ayasam darujam babbajam cha  
sarattaratta mani-kundalesu puttesu daresu cha ya apekha*

*etam dalham bandhanam ahu dhira oharinam sithilam duppamuncham  
etam pi chetvana paribbajanti anapekhino kamasukham pahaya*

Fetters of wood, rope, or even iron, say the wise, are not as strong as selfish attachment to wealth and family. Such fetters drag us down and are hard to break.

Break them by overcoming selfish desires, and turn from the world of sensory pleasure without a backward glance.

*Dhammapada, Chapter Twenty-four, verses 12 and 13.*

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

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