

THE TALKS OF EKNATH EASWARAN

29

Inner Freedom & Beauty
Finding Unity in Personal Relationships

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 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

With this month's study of Chapter Five in *Conquest of Mind*, we are entering deeper waters. Our curriculum will give us a chance to reflect on who we really are and what our real nature is, deep beneath the surface of consciousness. The central image of this chapter is the lake of the mind. When the mind is agitated, swirling and heaving like a lake on a windy day, we see nothing but the fragmented surface of life. But as the mind calms down and the waves get smaller, we begin to see through the waves to catch little glimpses of our deeper Self. Our emphasis this month will be on reducing the waves of agitation in our mind, with the goal of getting acquainted with some of the hidden spiritual riches of our true Self.

Reading

My friends' children have been learning to swim, and throughout the summer I received glowing reports about how well they were doing. At the beginning, I remember, the children themselves turned in a very different story. "Just looking at all that water makes me scared," they told me. "I'll never be able to swim!" They believed that, and they acted on it. When their parents drove them into town for lessons, there was wailing and gnashing of teeth all along the road.

Now these same children have invited me to preside over their graduation from swimming school. They look forward to coming to the pool now; they swim back and forth, play games underwater, even dive in the deep end. This did not come about overnight. It came through hard work, under the guidance of a good swimming teacher who knows just how to demonstrate the strokes and skills she wants her pupils to develop.

The transformation starts in the "kiddie pool," where drowning is difficult even if you have a talent for it. There the children learn to duck their heads under the water and hold their breath. They learn to blow bubbles. They hold on to the side and learn to kick.

Finally comes time for the big pool, of which they are scared stiff. This is only natural; after all, the water is over their heads. To their vivid imaginations, drowning is too distinct a possibility to ignore, lifeguard or no lifeguard. And it looks so far from one side to the other!

Partly they are persuaded into the water; partly, I suspect, they are pushed. They feel this is a monstrous unkindness. "We're land creatures," they want to argue. "Why should we learn to get along in an alien element?" That is a logical question.

But after a while, through guidance and experience, they lose that fear of the water. Now they are at home in the pool.

We accept this as a natural part of a child's education. Learning to do stunts in the water is part of growing up.

If we never get the opportunity to see somebody do such wonderful things in the mental world, it is mainly because our civilization offers no real facilities for training the mind. But with the right training, any of us can learn to be at home in the world of the mind, just as those children learned to be at home in the water.

Classical Indian mysticism compares the mind to a lake, which for most of us is continually lashed into waves by the winds of emotional stimulus and response. The real storm winds are four: anger, fear, greed, and self-will. One or another is generally blowing; if it's not the southerly, it's a nor'wester. As a result, the water is in a constant state of agitation. Even when the surface appears calm, murky currents are stirring underneath.

Through meditation and the other powerful allied disciplines, however, the lake of the mind can be made absolutely clear. When not even a ripple disturbs the surface, you can look into the crystal waters of the mind and see the very bottom: the divine ground of existence which is the basis of our personality.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Sri Easwaran speaks of four winds that disturb the surface of our consciousness. Please take no more than five minutes to reflect on the past week, and note three things that agitated your mind. Simply write them down without comment, and make a brief note of which of the four "winds" – anger, fear, greed, or self-will – was blowing most fiercely at the time. Be sure not to take longer than five minutes for this part of the exercise.

Then go on to the second part of the exercise, which is just as important. Write your mantram for five minutes. Concentrate on the mantram and don't dwell on the things that agitated you. If this exercise appeals to you, you can do it once a day for the next two weeks. It's important not to dwell on the causes of agitation, as that will defeat the purpose of the exercise. Rather, keep your focus on the mantram and treat the agitating thoughts and memories as distractions.

What results do you note from this experiment? If you were to do it regularly, how might it help you develop a calmer, healthier attitude toward the things that agitate you? How might you become more adept at noticing agitation as it first starts, and applying the mantram to it?

Reading for Inspiration

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

Conclude with thirty minutes of meditation.

LESSON TWO

This month, we are studying Chapter Five in *Conquest of Mind*, with a special focus on reducing agitation in the mind. Our goal is to gain a deeper understanding of who we really are. Last week, we worked at identifying the causes of agitation, and used the mantram to reduce their effect. We'll repeat that experiment this week, and examine some of the ways we can reduce the agitation that arises due to surface differences between ourselves and others.

Reading

Classical Indian mysticism compares the mind to a lake, which for most of us is continually lashed into waves by the winds of emotional stimulus and response. The real storm winds are four: anger, fear, greed, and self-will. One or another is generally blowing; if it's not the southerly, it's a nor'wester. As a result, the water is in a constant state of agitation. Even when the surface appears calm, murky currents are stirring underneath.

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Christian mystics call this center of personality "the Christ within." In Sanskrit it is called simply Atman, "Self." But the Buddha did not even go that far. He made no attempt at all to tell us what we shall see there. Always practical, he leaves the labels to us; his job is to get us to make the discovery ourselves. "You don't have to accept anybody's word for this," he would say. "Dive deep and see for yourself what you find."

Despite all the words that scholars have written on this subject, we can understand this supreme discovery only when we experience it ourselves. This is the great paradox of mysticism: until you enter nirvana, to use the Buddha's term, you will not be able to understand what nirvana is.

We can get an intriguing clue, however, through this image of the lake of the mind, which fits well with the Buddha's concept of consciousness. On the surface level of awareness, everyone seems separate. We look different, wear different clothes, have different speech patterns, different ambitions, different conditioning. This is the physical level of awareness, below which the vast majority of us cannot see because of the agitation of the mind.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Sri Easwaran says that the agitation of the mind keeps us from seeing beneath the fragmented surface of life, in which all of us appear separate. Separateness gives rise to various negative traits, such as jealousy, competitiveness, lack of understanding, and impatience. Let's repeat the exercise we did last week, but aim it this time specifically at the agitation that arises from a fragmented vision of life:

Please take five minutes (not more!) to reflect on the past week, and note one or two instances of separateness – such as disagreement or jealousy or mistrust – that agitated your mind. Simply write them down without comment. Be sure not to take longer than five minutes for this part of the exercise. It's fine to take less than five minutes.

Then go on to the second part of the exercise, which is just as important. Write your mantram for five minutes, letting go of all thought of the things that agitated you. If it appeals to you, you can do this exercise once a day. It's important not to dwell on the causes of agitation, as that will defeat the purpose. Rather, keep your focus on the mantram and treat the agitating thoughts and memories as distractions.

When we become aware of the discomfort that comes with a feeling of separateness from others, it can motivate us to let go of that separateness. What are some practical ways in which you've used the Eight Points to overcome separateness and draw closer to others? How might you use them more effectively?

Watching the Talk

When it's time for inspiration, please read the following introduction and watch the first talk on this DVD: *Inner Freedom and Beauty*.

In this talk, Easwaran shows how the Buddha questioned the standard assumptions of his day, and turned them into tools for teaching us that it's not what we wear or how we look that counts, but how we think and live. He outlines some of the stages in developing this awareness. First, we develop detachment by learning to respond freely, with equanimity, no matter what happens. This freedom brings us the ability to love deeply and well. From love comes a beauty that is not affected by outward changes. Finally, we find the ultimate freedom, which he speaks about at the end of the talk: we get free from our *samskaras* – the conditioned patterns of thought and habit which affect not only our mind but even our body.

Conclude with thirty minutes of meditation.

LESSON THREE

Note to coordinators of spiritual fellowship groups: You may want to ask members to bring their copies of God Makes the Rivers to Flow to this meeting, since the discussion period includes reference to that book.

This month we are studying Chapter Five of *Conquest of Mind*. For the past two weeks we have concentrated on reducing the agitation that arises due to negative forces in our life. Now we shift our focus to the calming effect of positive forces. We'll reflect this week on the goal we're moving towards – becoming aware of the unity of life.

Reading

Just below the surface is the level of personal, individual consciousness, a comparatively shallow region which is easily stirred by the winds of sense impressions and emotions. The more physically oriented we are – that is, the more we identify with our bodies and feelings – the more caught up we will be in this mind-world of constantly changing forms. In this state it can be quite a chore to get close to other people; all our awareness is caught in the things that make us seem separate from them and unique. Their differences seem to keep getting in our way.

Underlying this level, largely unsuspected, is what the Buddha calls *alaya-vijnana*: “storehouse consciousness,” the depths of the collective unconscious. There is only one *alaya-vijnana*; at bottom, everyone's unconscious is one and the same. The deeper we get, the more clearly we shall see that our differences with others are superficial, and that ninety-nine percent of what we are is the same for all.

To the extent that we can turn our back on our petty, private mind-world and learn to dive into deeper consciousness, we can free ourselves from the influence of the storms that stir up those shallow waters at the surface. At the same time, as we get deeper, we move closer and closer to other people; we feel closer to life as a whole. This, in effect, is what learning to swim in the unconscious is all about.

I have read of people who can race along on a Harley-Davidson and leap over a row of cars. This is an accomplishment, I agree. It requires daring, training, and resolution. But of what real use is it? By contrast, with that same kind of daring, you can learn to go deep-sea diving in the fathomless lake of the mind. In our contemporary world, when most people, I think, feel helplessly at sea, this is a vital gift. When you master it, your life becomes a beacon that others can follow.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Easwaran is pointing us toward an experience of unity: “The deeper we get, the more clearly we shall see that our differences with others are superficial, and that ninety-nine percent of what we are is the same for all.”

Think of some instances in your life when you and others seemed united. How did the state of your mind add to this? At what times in your life do you feel most united with others? At what times do you feel most united within yourself? Choose an inspirational passage from *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* that embodies that experience for you. See below for a selection to start with.

How can you use the Eight Points to bring more of such unity to your day? In particular, how might One-Pointed Attention help? Easwaran has said that finding unity within – by unifying our attention – helps us find it outside as well, among the people in our life. Have you noticed that dynamic? Can you give examples? Take a look at your life and note where you fragment your attention – by doing two things at a time, for example, or by quickly alternating between several different tasks. How might that fragmentation of attention make it harder to feel unity with others? How might splitting attention agitate the mind? Where might you start to unify your attention?

Reading for Inspiration

When it’s time for inspiration, please read the following passages from the new (third) edition of *God Makes the Rivers to Flow*:

Let Me Walk in Beauty (p. 188)
Simple Union (p. 170)
The Real Lovers of God (p. 148)
You Must Forget Yourself in Prayer (p. 61)
Epistle on Love (p. 140)
Duties of the Heart (p. 154)
Finding Unity (p. 145)
United in Heart (p. 102)

In a spiritual fellowship group, you may want to ask members to read aloud the passage they selected during the discussion period.

Conclude with thirty minutes of meditation.

LESSON FOUR

This week we complete our study of Chapter Five in *Conquest of Mind*. We have been exploring how agitation in the mind keeps us from seeing our deeper identity — our true Self, which is one with all life. Last week we discussed ways to draw closer to that ideal of unity. This week we'll focus on how we might live it out better in our relationships, thereby calming the waves of the mind.

Reading

The mind, of course, has been the subject of very serious study. But from the point of view of spiritual psychology, how can we expect to understand the mind by using the same methods we use to study the physical universe? The very concept of entering the unconscious while conscious is beyond the scope of our imagination. We identify ourselves with the mind, so how can we expect to study it objectively? As long as we believe we are the mind, we take for granted that we can find fulfillment by catering to its demands and living for its private satisfactions. And as long as we remain at the surface like this, we can never see through the mind clearly. We have little choice but to be tossed about like a toy boat in its fierce storms.

But we can learn a different perspective. In meditation we discover that we are not the mind. It is an inner world of its own, an environment we can learn to move through. Just as those children now go to the pool with eagerness on their faces, when I find tempests rising in the mind I have learned to swim with joy. I can dive to the bottom and bring up pearls, the infinite inner resources that are the legacy of us all. Instead of feeling threatened by adverse circumstances, I can remain calm and help to change those circumstances. Instead of moving away from difficult people I can actually enjoy their company, move closer to them, and win them over.

This vast treasury is within the reach of all. Sri Ramakrishna, one of the greatest mystics India has ever produced, sang ecstatically of what waits to be discovered at the seabed of consciousness:

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep
In the Ocean of God's Beauty;
If you descend to the uttermost depths,
There you will find the gem of Love. . . .

Once we have learned to dive deep in meditation, there is no end to the resources we can bring to our daily life; there is no challenge we will be unable to meet. Each morning we can descend to the depths and gather armloads of precious jewels: breathtaking gems of love and wisdom,

lustrous pearls of patience and compassion. We can distribute them freely, knowing we have an infinite inheritance from which to draw every day.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

In this reading, Easwaran mentions one of his favorite strategies for affirming the unity of life: “Instead of moving away from difficult people I can actually enjoy their company, move closer to them, and win them over.” This is indeed a terribly demanding art — one that should not be leapt into without care and preparation. In fact, we will concentrate this week only on the first of these challenging assignments: enjoying the company of difficult people.

One of the major obstacles to enjoying the company of people who “go against our grain” is that their very presence (or even the thought of them!) agitates our mind. Therefore, this is a good opportunity to apply the skill we polished in the first two lessons: repeating the mantram to calm agitation. You may want to try the following exercise. Write the name of the person you’re having difficulties with at the top of a page. Then take a few minutes to write down the person’s good qualities, or things that this person has done to help you or others in the past. Now write your mantram on the rest of the page. This exercise gives you a chance to “re-engineer” your response to that person in private, before the agitation stirred by their presence makes it harder to concentrate.

In what other ways have you used the Eight Points to change your attitude towards difficult people in your life? On what occasions are you a “difficult person” and how might you change that? How might you better live out the vision of unity described in your meditation passages?

How might you keep your attention unified – not speeded up or agitated – when in the presence of difficult people? One strategy that Easwaran recommends in this week’s talk is to listen attentively to what the other person says, even if it may be a criticism of you or your opinions. Have you tried to do this? How did it feel while you did it? And how did it feel afterwards? What role did concentration play?

Watching the Talk

When it’s time for inspiration, please watch the second talk on the DVD, *Finding Unity in Personal Relationships*.

Conclude with thirty minutes of meditation.

INNER FREEDOM AND BEAUTY

December 1, 1979

Edited Transcript

When the Buddha says, all those who walk in the footsteps of the illumined ones, they alone can be called brahmins. In other words, the caste connotation attached to the word brahmin in India is not necessarily correct. It is true for example in my village when I was growing up as a high school boy, I had a number of brahmin students in my class.

But, even when my uncle, who is my teacher's brother, whose name is Kunikrishnan, Little Krishna. Kuni is Malayalam. Whenever he saw me playing with my classmates, wherever it was, he would stop me and say, make sure that you play with brahmin boys. I don't think he was being caste-conscious at all. Because I remember in my class – I'm talking about those days – even in my school, I don't ever remember brahmin boys getting into trouble. They are not aggressive. They are not terribly ambitious. They are very gentle people. And to some extent, a little timid like myself. And what he was trying to tell me – he could have put it in much better language – was play with those who are gentle, who will not try to retaliate. In other words, with whom you can play in harmony and learn, even in a playful manner, the joy of playing as a good team.

I never try to keep it a secret from all of you that I played most of the games that all of you have played. And my teacher who has a very compassionate nature, when she saw me playing some of these foolish games, she would tell me just a little that what I was going after was pain. But, I was so certain that what I was going after was pleasure that I dared to think that she was wrong.

And, it was only after a number of years – when I began to understand that the human being, if he wants to grow to his full height, to her full height, has to turn his or her back upon themselves – that I understood the enormous size of my teacher and the infinitesimally small size of poor me. It was then that I began to have the desire: that I would give anything on the face of the earth to be like my teacher, to become like my grandmother. And this is considered in the Hindu tradition to be the onset of the teacher's grace. All my passions began to go towards her. All my desires began to be focused on her.

And I must tell you, my mother fortunately was almost part of my grandmother so there was no jealousy. There was no rivalry. In my whole village I was known always as Granny's boy. Nobody has ever called me Mama's boy. And even in my school, my high school class like Julia. You know, there were a lot of boisterous fellows in my class. Don't think it is only in St. Vincent's. We had a lot of boisterous fellows. When they would try to draw me into some escapade to show my true grit, I would say very easily to them, I don't think my granny is going to like it. And imagine, boisterous fellows in your high school, what they would do to you if

Jeff were to say, my granny wouldn't like it. You would have to leave town. See, everybody knew my granny. When I would tell all these rough riders that my granny wouldn't like it, they would say, "That is true."

And in the Hindu tradition so much importance is attached to the relationship with the teacher. Not because the teacher is particularly in need of this kind of reassurance, but because this is how our desires get unified. He brings all our desires into focus. And that is how my teacher began to help in the unification of all my desires. Even though it took many years for me to understand this unification and actively, intentionally strive for it.

So, the Buddha is now asking all of us, light your torch from your teacher's fire. Just as I lit my torch from my teacher's fire, you can light your torch from mine and others later on will be able to light their torch from yours. This is how spiritual work goes on.

The next is, "Not matted hair nor birth makes a man a brahmin. But the truth and love for all life with which his heart is ever full." You had a play called *Hair*. And one of our friends who is here when she was in London, I asked her what plays she had seen. *Hair*. When the whole play originated here. There was so much importance attached to this subject of hair that I want you to know that not even the most spectacular Berkeley hairstyles can come anywhere near some of the sadhus that wander about the highways of India.

On Mondays they would come to my ancestral home. The most spectacular hairstyles. And there is a particular style that is called "matted locks," *jatta*. Shiva's hairstyle is matted locks. And some of these sadhus who would come to our doorstep on Monday when my grandmother would give alms or my mother would give alms – they expected to be taken very seriously as sadhaks because of these dramatic hairstyles.

And it shows you that even in those days – I was about Julia's age – I had a little questioning streak in me. When my mother would come and give alms and the other girls would come and give alms, I used to ask my grandmother, why do we give alms to them? And she would say because they are taking to the spiritual life. And I used to ask her, Why? What is the evidence – just because of their special hairstyles? And this was her nobility. She said, that's a very good question, Little Lamp. You must be learning something at school. This was a question that she never asked.

And I used to mention a few of my less spiritual classmates and say, supposing they grew hair like this and came to the doorstep. Would you treat them with respect? See, I was actually questioning her directly. My grandmother would be so overcome with my brilliance that she would go and tell my uncles, you know how brilliant this boy is? He is able to question some of our spiritual assumptions. I didn't know that I was anticipating the Buddha.

I am not . . . Actually the justification that they have in India is even if there are five among them who are not valid, there are the remaining five who are valid. So, why not give all the ten the benefit of the doubt instead of trying to be lacking in respect to the other five. It's not a very valid argument I must say.

And when I took my mother to Benares we stayed in a dharamshala called Manikarnika. And it was later on that I learned that was where Shankara had stayed – perhaps in the same home. And we came across the most preposterous hairstyles anywhere in the world. Thousands of them. And I began to understand that hairstyles and special robes, beads and rosaries, they had nothing to do with the spiritual life.

Now, when we came back to Berkeley this belief had invaded Telegraph Avenue. There were people in all kinds of disarray on Telegraph Avenue under the impression that this was a sign of spiritual awareness. And I was telling you about a meeting where I spoke on the Gita where the secretary had a chain of human bones around his neck. That was his idea of that Shiva is considered to frequent the cemetery so he said, he probably drew his inspiration from that. I like the way of being reasonably well dressed. Reasonably in fashion.

And it's part of the respect that we pay to the body that is the temple of the Lord. And when we neglect the body or subject the body to unseemly appearance to me it is a matter of lacking in respect for the temple of the Lord which is our body.

[Section Two]

So you can be very spiritual in a turtleneck. And there are certain circles for example where they'll say, turtleneck? Oh, no. He is not wearing a *jibba*. He is not wearing a Mexican shirt. So, let us try to cultivate this idea that we can be presentable outwardly and presentable inwardly.

It is not what we wear, but it is our detachment from it. And I would say, when you want something very badly – this doesn't apply to people below twenty. Please make sure that this doesn't apply to people below twenty at all. But over twenty, I say, when you want to wear something very badly, don't wear it. When you want to buy something very badly, don't buy it. And what you're doing is drawing that desire into your sadhana. This doesn't mean not making the best of your personal appearance. But I was reading just an hour ago an article by a very important futurologist called K-a-h-n, is it? He and somebody else – futurologist. They say that so much research is going on now on Madison Avenue into discovering what is our "hot button." It's a very astute way of learning how to manipulate us.

And this article says human beings have eight hot buttons. And if you can press on any of those buttons, you can make them buy what they want. That is what they think. Now, what the Buddha is saying is, "Have no hot button at all. Wear one long robe in which there's no button. Nobody can press a hot button. Nobody can make you buy anything you want."

“Saffron robe, outward show, does not make a brahmin. But training the mind and senses through practice of meditation.”

In the early days, more than twenty years ago, a few of my friends, one of whom some of you know, used to suggest to me that I should turn up my eyebrows. You know, Tennyson has a phrase in one of his poems. I think this is one of the Arthurian figures, who Tennyson says, has “married eyebrows.” You understand what the significance is, Jim? Both the eyebrows come together. Mine are not quite married; they are engaged. And this man wanted me, really, to cut a spiritual figure. And from the very best of motives, he said, “You’ve got such lavish eyebrows. Why don’t you twirl them like that?” And he also suggested I wear a turban. Oh yes. There was also another suggestion that I have a goatee. And you look at my picture, twenty years ago. The same old hairstyle. The same old face style. And it shows, even outwardly, that I try to maintain a reasonable measure of unchangeability in my appearance.

And sometimes, you know, I go and see fellows whom I knew three years ago. I can’t make them out. So, what I would say, even physically, let us try to maintain a reasonable level of limited changelessness. And when we were on the Blue Mountain, one of my schoolmates, who had risen to be a very high official in the postal system, he called on my mother. And when I was on my summer vacation, he was in charge of the entire district at the foot of the Blue Mountain. He came to see my mother and he wanted to see me. And when my mother brought him into my room, I hadn’t seen him probably for a quarter of a century. I remember he looked at me and said, “You still look the same as you were in your high school.” What he was saying was not so much a physical sameness. But he was trying to observe a certain immunity from change, physically as well as mentally.

Sumner was asking me a question today about how to choose a mental state and maintain it. That’s what I was always trying to do. Even when I had difficult people in my class or difficult people as my colleagues, I would try to maintain an outlook of friendliness, goodwill, which did not come naturally to me. I used to maintain it by behaving very kindly, speaking in a friendly manner, helping even when it was at the expense of my convenience and comfort. I managed to keep my mind more or less in equilibrium.

“Not riches nor high caste makes a man a brahmin. Free yourself from selfish desires and you will become a brahmin. He has thrown off his chains. He trembles not in fear. No selfish bonds can ensnare him. No impure thoughts pollute his mind.” When we dwell on the past, remember unkind words spoken to us, get all resentful, or look back upon the past and dwell on those raging conflicts between the past and the present, the Buddha is saying, we are actually putting on handcuffs.

You remember, Joshua, many years ago, when Roberta was going to buy Christmas gifts, she asked him what he would like to have. And he said, “Mummy, if you love me, get me a pair of handcuffs.” That’s what he really asked for. In our case, this is what we are asking for. When

we are resentful, when we are jealous, when we are unkind to others, when we sulk because we are not able to get our way, we are just going into a little workshop and working on our handcuffs. And when Christmas comes, we go, put these handcuffs in our stockings and get up early morning, open the stockings and tell everybody, “See what Santa Claus has given me – a nice pair of handcuffs so that I cannot help others, I cannot be of service to anyone, including myself.”

It’s interesting that in some of the difficult stages of meditation, you do feel certain *bandhas*, as they call certain grips in certain parts of your body and mind. I don’t know how to explain it. It’s partly in the subtle body, partly in the physical body. But I can tell you, from my own personal experience, that not only did I feel it in the mind but I also began to feel it in the body – certain parts of the body. Here, here, here, shoulders. There is a kind of grip. There is a kind of bandha. And it may have been there for years. You have got used to this kind of bandha, this kind of grip, this kind of frozen tension.

And it is when you break through some of your samskaras, burn out your samskaras, I cannot tell you in words what a wonderful feeling of glorious relaxation you have from a grip that has been with you, holding you down for years. Just imagine, even if somebody has been holding us down only for ten minutes, if he lets go of that hold, so tremendous is the relief. Here, when a samskara has been putting our body and mind in its grip and now it releases, it is made to release us after years of tyranny, the joy, the relaxation, can be beyond all words. That’s how, sometimes, old physical problems solve themselves, old emotional problems solve themselves. And even when you are sitting in your chair, this complete absence of bandha, complete absence of a fierce hold by the samskara, that itself is infinite joy. And this is something that will come our way if we practice meditation regularly, follow the allied disciplines and unify all our desires for our supreme goal.

FINDING UNITY IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

December 15, 1979

Edited Transcript

We are continuing the latter part of the last chapter of the Dhammapada, which to me is a complete practical manual for spiritual living. Sometimes, scholars raise the question, what about other writings ascribed to the Buddha? What about other great sutras that have come down to us in the name of the Buddha? My answer would be, just as Mahatma Gandhi said, in the Sermon on the Mount, you have the complete teachings of Jesus the Christ. Similarly, I would have no hesitation in saying that in the Dhammapada, we have the complete teaching of the Compassionate Buddha.

And when he uses the word *brahmin*, it is not with its caste connotation or its social implications. But in the original sense of *brahmam vethiti brahmanah* - whoever has a permanent vision of life in which the Lord is playing innumerable parts, he or she is a brahmin. And even in the early days, when I used to be asked, "What kind of a vision have you had?" or "What kind of visions have you had?" I would always aspire to this permanent vision of seeing with my eyes open, as I do today, through the blessing of my teacher, seeing the same Lord of Love present in all human beings, in all countries and in all forms of life. Through the practice of meditation and the allied disciplines, we can so change our vision, our mode of perceiving life from fragmented to full, from separate to whole.

*Akkosam vadhbandham cha
aduttho yo titikkhati
Khantibalam balanikam
tam aham brumi brahmanam.*

When he gives us the first word, it is one of the secrets of quieting the mind, whittling away the ego. You have got a favorite country pastime here, where you take a piece of wood and keep on whittling away until you get the shape you want. Similarly, we can all look upon ourselves as country people. And this is the whittling headquarters.

There are going to be two aspects to this, as usual. As long as self-will is ferocious, as it is in the case of most of us, nobody need be embarrassed, nobody need be ashamed that our self-will is so inflated, so fierce, that any violation of it from anybody upsets our mind, throws it into a topspin, plunges into a depression and goads it to burst into fury.

I am describing the modern human condition, which some of you may perhaps remember, maybe about twenty years ago, when I first came to this country, was portrayed in that play and film, "Look Back in Anger." Are you familiar with that play or film? I think John Osborne. He's quieted down considerably now. And I think he looks back in regret.

Now, see, the Buddha often will play the perfect physician. And he's not trying to be offensive. He's not trying to put us down. But when he says that most of your problems arise from inflated self-will, which expresses itself in an inability to see another person's point of view, what I am trying to say is it is not that we have always to accept the other person's point of view. But under no circumstances should we refuse to acknowledge that the other person has a point of view.

And on campuses I have found the most scholarly people sometimes unable to concede that others have a cogent point of view. And training myself through the practice of meditation and the allied disciplines, I can now live in the midst of opposite points of view and yet retain my own. I can be completely loyal to my way of life and yet respect another person's way of life. And when you are able to do this, to be completely loyal to the spiritual goal and yet not reflect on other people's integrity, show lack of respect to other people's personality, often the other person begins to respond. And during my own sadhana of thirty years, I have had quite a few examples of people who did not want to listen to any spiritual interpretation, who did not want me to talk about the scriptures, quietly changing some of their ways because of the friendliness that I showed, the lack of ill will that I showed, and of course, the complete absence of superiority. The more spiritual you become, the less superior you feel to others because you realize more and more the unity of life. The superiority complex is most rampant where separateness is rampant.

And we can all train ourselves in the same way by not asserting our views with attachment to them, not putting forward our views to thrust them on other people but the very best way – exemplify them in our own personal life. And for me, every day it is like this. I take a few minutes just to see in what all respects I could improve on yesterday's program. And this is what makes my today a little brighter than yesterday, tomorrow a little brighter than today. This is how everybody grows.

And I would suggest, when you have made a mistake, as I made mistakes many years ago, many times, don't try to dwell upon it or get self-deprecating about it. But try to correct that mistake, improve on that record. And in my vocabulary, this is why we have been given the competitive instinct. I am not one of those who will say, oh, no, the human being is not competitive. I say the human being is competitive. But it is given for a very good purpose – to compete with me. Not to compete with Laurel and Gale, but to compete with me. And if you remember this, you'll gradually become less and less competitive towards others, more and more competitive towards yourself in a very healthy manner.

In fact, to go in for a kind of ridiculous humor, even those who suffer from a little more jealousy than is healthy, I would say make your yesterday very jealous of your today. Make your today very jealous of your tomorrow. It's a kind of Puckish humor in which I used to indulge occasionally. Just say to yourself, you see, Jessica, you say, "You look at me tomorrow, Sunday." And you say, "You're going to be very jealous of how beautiful I am going to be in my conduct."

[Section Two]

And *akkosam*. In *The Imitation of Christ*, that marvelous book of spiritual inspiration, which Swami Vivekananda used to carry with him – the Gita on the one hand and *The Imitation of Christ* on the other – you will often come across this counsel: bear with people. Don't answer back. And believe me, for those of us who have been in the educational world, with our intellects sharpened to be sarcastic, it's a very difficult thing to restrain oneself. You know, at a meeting or at a symposium, when you're being attacked, when you're being criticized, it's part of your responsibility to answer back with compound interest. And I was also in the habit of doing that until I began to understand that there was no need for me to get exasperated if somebody made an attack on me. Most people are capable of using their judgment - my colleagues, my students – they were all acquainted with my devotion to my students and my subject.

So I started just repeating my mantram and keeping quiet. It was not at all easy. It was sometimes misinterpreted, that I was at a loss for an answer and somebody who usually used to keep quiet, he would also come and jump on me. And it was very difficult training but very soon I began to understand that I was detached, I was getting detached. When they were criticizing somebody, they weren't criticizing me. They were criticizing a statue they have sculpted, put in the corner. Why should I be bothered if they threw darts at a statue which they had put up? And that's the kind of image that can be very helpful.

And therefore, when you're criticized or somebody comes and says . . . unfortunately in life, there are some people who seem to get some kind of mild satisfaction by conveying to you whatever unfavorable remarks have been made about you. This is again very much the academic world, you see. And they have added a little more. And we get so exasperated, you see. In fact, I would like to inform you how tragic these can be because sometimes some remark is made jocularly, in all goodwill with a little bit of banter. And the tone, intonation, they are all left out. And somebody comes and says, "Do you know what was said about you? Terrible. I cannot tell you." You run after that person, say "Please tell me." "Oh, no, no, no. You'd be lying awake throughout the night and I wouldn't be a party to that." You go back and say, "Please." And "As you insist. This is what has been said about you." And even, I mean, even recently, when somebody is trying to tell me something like that, I always say very nicely, I don't want to hear. This is something that my teacher trained me. I say, "I don't want to hear. Please don't tell me about it." We can do that. And the more we are able to do this, the quieter the mind becomes.

Titikkhati. *Titikkha* means the capacity to bear and bear and bear. And there are people, I suppose, in the language of psychology, whose threshold of tolerance is very high. Is that the expression they use? There are people who have low thresholds, there are people who have no thresholds at all. And you can learn to raise and lower your threshold of tolerance as you like. The practice of meditation and the allied disciplines make you . . . John, you haven't seen this

kind of portable threshold. You just, when you're in the midst of people who are difficult, you just raise it high. And you're in the midst of people who are very, very good, you just lower it. And when you are in the midst of spiritual people you keep the threshold outside and walk in. Tittikkha is a very special word.

The next:

Akkodhanam vatavantam
silavantam anussutam
Dantam antimasariram
tam aham brumi brahmanam.

Akkodahanam – the same thing. In getting angry, you're wasting your prana. In getting angry, you are alienating others and alienating yourself. In expressing your anger through unkind words, through unkind acts or through omission, not cooperating, going your own way, you are making yourself a target for physical and emotional problems.

Silavantam. This is a favorite word in the Buddha's vocabulary. It is Sanskrit, *shila*. *Shila* in Pali means right conduct. And in India, again, for girls, some of the most beautiful Sanskrit words are the names of girls. Sushila – it's a beautiful name. Sushila – she whose conduct is always beautiful. That's how beauty comes. And we can all attest. When we find a girl whose conduct is always beautiful, we'll find her beautiful. We will see her as glamorous. We'll always want to be with her. Sushila. And shila therefore means one who tries to be beautiful always in conduct, in behavior, which is saying what is kind, doing what is helpful, always putting those around first.

There are three words in Sanskrit that throw light on the spiritual life. One is *shravanam*. Second is *mananam*. Third is *nidhidhyasanam*. Christine used to tease me an awful lot in the early days when I would say twenty years ago, "We have a saying in India there are some people into whose ears the words will go in and then they will come out through this ear." She used to say, whenever I would say, "There is a saying in India," she used to tease me until I realized that you have that common saying here, too. And it's not enough if the words go in here and come out here. They should go in here and then go up here [indicates through ear and then up to brain]. That's where the block is. And the practice of directing our attention opens a pathway. And there are...even on school campuses and college campuses, we all know we say, "Oh, very good lecture. Fine speaker." Next week you ask him, "What did he say?" "I don't know."

And see, when my teacher would tell me something, she would always say, "Think about what I said. Reflect about what I said." It took me some time to understand what exactly I had to do. But later on, whenever I would hear something that would light up life, whether it was in a book or whether it was in a lecture, I'd think about it, reflect on it, which is called manana.

And I mean there are a few people who, I remember, when I first talked about *preya* and *shreya*, you know, that which pleases immediately and that which brings permanent benefit, I could see right in front of me, when we were in Life Science Hall with a thousand people, I could see many eyes light up. And there were many that did not light up. Freeway. [Indicates passing through one ear and out the other.] No signals, no lights, go through. And the Buddha says, *Anussutam*. He or she is a good spiritual aspirant, who will reflect over what the teacher says, who'll try to see, "How have I been losing because I am not practicing this? How can I gain this by practicing it?" And when we start doing this because of our love for our teacher, just as I had my love for my teacher, we begin to benefit. When, sometimes, for example, I hear reports about what I said at the church, sometimes the jokes are repeated very carefully. I used to say, "That's just the coating. What about the pill? That's what you are supposed to swallow."

*Vari pokkharapatte va
aragger'iva sasapo
Yo na limpati kamesu
tam aham brumi brahmanam.*

The lotus leaf – I was describing it to you the other day – almost a foot in diameter. It cannot be wetted. If you pour water on it, it will not become wet. We can have our meal off the lotus leaf. It'll be as clean at the end as at the beginning. And the Buddha is saying the true brahmin, the illumined man or woman, they can go into the midst of very unloving people They will not react. They will act lovingly. They will not get embroiled. And Jesus, you may remember, he would go into taverns where there were people who were addicted to alcohol, to bad behavior, and he would help them. He would change their direction.

In other words, don't think we are going to live in a germ free world. As we become spiritually aware, as we become established in the Self, we'll be able to go and influence the campus, influence the medical world, influence the bazaar. Just as in a small way we are beginning to influence our nice town of Petaluma.

VERSES

*Akkosam vadhabandham cha
aduttho yo titikkhati
Khantibalam balanikam
tam aham brumi brahmmanam.*

That one I call a brahmin who fears neither prison nor death. He or she has the power of love no army can defeat.

Chapter Twenty-six, verse 17

*Akkodhanam vatavantam
silavantam anussutam
Dantam antimasariram
tam aham brumi brahmanam.*

That one I call a brahmin who is never angry, never goes astray from the path. He is pure and self-controlled. She has received her last body.

Chapter Twenty-six, verse 18

*Vari pokkharapatte va
araggar'iva sasapo
Yo na limpati kamesu
tam aham brumi brahmanam.*

That one I call a brahmin who clings not to pleasure, no more than water to a lotus leaf or a mustard seed to the tip of a needle.

Chapter Twenty-six, verse 19

*na jatahi na gottena na jaccha hoti brahmano
yamhi saccham cha dhammo cha so sukhi so cha brahmano*

It is not matted hair nor birth that makes a brahmin, but truth and the love for all of life with which one's heart is full.

Chapter Twenty-six, verse 11

*pamsukuladharam jantum kizam dhamanisanthatam
ekam vanasmin jhayantam tam aham brumi brahmanam*

Saffron robe and outward show do not make a brahmin, but training of the mind and senses through practice of meditation.

Chapter Twenty-six, verse 13

*na chaham brahmanam brumi yonijam mattisambhavam
bhovadi nama so hoti sa che hoti sakimchano
akimchanam anadanam tam aham brumi brahmanam*

Neither riches nor high caste make a brahmin. Free yourself from selfish desires, and you will become a brahmin.

Chapter Twenty-six, verse 14

*sabbasamyojanam chetva yo ve na paritassati
sangatigam visamyuttam tam aham brumi brahmanam*

They have thrown off their chains; they tremble not in fear. No selfish bonds can ensnare them, no impure thought pollute their minds.

Chapter Twenty-six, verse 15

TERMS AND REFERENCES

bandha A bond, tie, fetter.

Blue Mountain The Nilgiris, a range of mountains in South India where Easwaran lived for many years.

brahmin The word *brahmin* refers to a member of the priestly 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.

dharamshala Lodging for spiritual pilgrims.

jibba Long shirt often worn by Indian men.

Life Science Hall Location of Easwaran's course on meditation at the University of California.

Little Lamp Nickname that Easwaran's grandmother gave him.

Malayalam The language spoken in Kerala, India.

prana Energy, vital wealth, the breath of life.

sadhak A spiritual aspirant.

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

sadhu A holy person or sage.

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

sutra Concise statement of a principle or truth; also, a collection of such statements. Used especially with reference to Hindu or Buddhist teachings.

Shankara (c. 788–820) Born in Kerala state, south India, Shankara entered monastic life as a teenager. His commentaries on the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and other key scriptures systematized and revitalized the spiritual heritage of Hinduism.

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