

THE TALKS OF EKNATH EASWARAN

30 *The Spiritual Fight* *Seeing Life Clearly*

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

In last month's lessons, we pondered two ancient spiritual questions: Who are we? And what is it that keeps us from realizing our true nature? This month we continue that inquiry, with a special focus on the most persistent and challenging of spiritual obstacles: negative thinking. Sri Easwaran will analyze, precisely and practically, the habitual thought patterns that cause most of the trouble in our lives. Guided by his analysis, we will delve into techniques for improving our practice of the most important tool for self-discovery: meditation.

This week's reading, drawn from Chapter Six of *Conquest of Mind*, suggests that progress in meditation is very closely tied to our attitude towards ourselves and others. We can lift up and ennoble that attitude through little choices throughout the day, and, in so doing, leave behind a swarm of unwanted distractions in meditation.

Reading

"I try hard in meditation," people sometimes tell me. "I have thirty minutes in the morning and thirty more in the evening, and I really give it my best. But I don't seem to be able to go deeper. What can I do?"

"If you are trying consistently to concentrate on the inspirational passage during those thirty minutes," I reply, "you are doing very well. But if you want to dive deep, you have to give your best during the times that you're not meditating too. It is not only during meditation that we make progress in training the mind, but also during the rest of the day."

Once we get beneath the surface of the mind, we begin to see that there is a very close connection between the kinds of distractions we have in meditation and the kinds of problems we face in daily living. It is these problems that prevent us from diving into deeper levels of consciousness. They are both internal and external. They arise in the mind, and we encounter them there in meditation; but because they shape our actions, we also encounter them during the day in a hundred and one disguises.

Sri Aurobindo, one of twentieth-century India's most luminous figures, has a good motto for reminding us of this: "All life is yoga." Every moment, he means, is an opportunity for training the mind.

The explanation of this is simple. Every moment, from the time we get up in the morning until we go to bed, we have a choice: to give our attention to ourselves, or to give it to those around us. If we indulge ourselves during the day, we should

not be surprised to find strong distractions in meditation the next morning. On the other hand, if we reduce the number of things we do just to please ourselves, distractions will be fewer and concentration deeper.

I would go so far as to say that dwelling on oneself is the root cause of most personal problems. The more preoccupied we become with our private fears, resentments, memories, and cravings, the more power they have over our attention. When we sit down to meditate, we cannot get our mind off ourselves. With practice, however, we can learn to pay more and more attention to the needs of others – and this carries over directly into meditation. Less self-centered thinking means fewer distractions, a clearer mind, fewer outgoing thoughts to impede our gathering absorption as meditation deepens.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Easwaran is making a clear connection between self-centered thinking and our problems – both external and internal. He says, “I would go so far as to say that dwelling on oneself is the root cause of most personal problems.”

If you give it some thought, this analysis is rather surprising. Most of us, if asked to identify the root cause of any particular problem, would probably blame it either on someone else, or upon ourselves. What Easwaran is suggesting here is that neither we nor others are the root cause of most problems. Rather, it is self-centered thinking: “The more preoccupied we become with our private fears, resentments, memories, and cravings, the more power they have over our attention.”

Please reflect on your daily thinking patterns and come up with a few small examples of this kind of self-centered thinking. Try not to see this pattern as something personal, but as a mental habit, something that can be changed with practice. In what ways might such self-centered thinking cause distractions in meditation and other problems? How might you use the Eight Points to modify that thinking habit? What effect might that change have on your meditation? Is there a particular inspirational passage or book of spiritual inspiration that might provide a model for this change? (For instance, the second stanza of the Saint Francis prayer has helped many people overcome self-centered thinking.)

Reading for Inspiration

When it's time for inspiration, please read all of Chapter Six in *Conquest of Mind*.

Conclude with thirty minutes of meditation.

LESSON TWO

In this week's reading from *Conquest of Mind*, Sri Easwaran takes us deeper, below the level of garden-variety distractions that arise in the first few years of meditation to the "really big fights" that meditators face when they dedicate themselves sincerely to daily practice.

It's important to remind ourselves here that great practical benefits accompany this struggle to master the "powerful currents of negative thinking that swirl deep in the unconscious mind." As we gradually leave behind the self-centered thinking that creates distractions in our meditation, we also leave behind many of our problems. Relationships improve; we feel more secure and vital; we gain a new sense of meaning in life. With these positive changes, our confidence grows and we dare to hope that we can transform long-standing patterns of negative thinking that have hemmed us in for years.

After years of practice, there may come a time when the clouds of daily distractions part for just a moment, and offer us a glimpse of the abiding peace and love that is our birthright. It is then that this spiritual fight to dispel the darkness and reclaim our true Self becomes attractive to us, even urgent.

Reading

No one begins to meditate without a mind full of distractions. "The mind is restless, turbulent, powerful, violent," says the Bhagavad Gita. "Trying to control it is like trying to tame the wind." So when somebody complains to me about meditation being difficult, my only consolation is, "Just wait. It's going to get a lot harder." Gaining control over one's own mind is the most difficult task a human being can undertake. All this preliminary sparring with distractions in meditation is to prepare us for the really big fights to come, when we struggle to transform the powerful currents of negative thinking that swirl deep in the unconscious mind.

This is a miraculous achievement, but there is no miracle about how it is accomplished. It requires a lot of hard work. When your meditation is progressing well, if your mind goes into a negative mood – about yourself, about your problems, about other people, about the state of the world – you should be able to switch your attention away from the negative and focus it on the positive. By doing this over and over again, you can reach a state in which negative thoughts cannot even appear on the scene. Then your behavior is always kind, your words are always helpful, and your life becomes a positive influence on all.

This lofty achievement, of course, is slow in coming. After the honeymoon with meditation is over, people often tell me, “I have more trouble with my mind now than I did when I started. Am I going backwards?”

“No,” I reassure them. “It is possible to go sideways in meditation, but not backwards.” Then I explain what is probably happening. In the early stages, all of us have a thousand little imps of distraction dancing around. As we move into deeper levels of awareness, this number is reduced to two or three; but then they are no longer imps. They are big, burly distractions, waiting for an opportunity to knock us to the floor.

This may sound bad, but it is really an encouraging development. When you have a thousand imps hitting you from all sides, how do you guard yourself? It is much better to have one big distraction right up front. It may be Goliath, but at least you know what you are dealing with, and you can train yourself to deal with it too.

These big fellows are not really distractions. They are *samskaras*: deep, conditioned tendencies to particular ways of thinking and acting, usually negative or self-willed, which have been dug in the mind through many years of repeating the same thought over and over.

Most of us, for example, have an anger *samskara*: an automatic response to want to lash out at others or ourselves when things do not go our way. At critical moments like these, it can be most helpful to remember that the disturbance has little to do with, say, whether someone took our parking place or we had to wait in line at the grocery store. Beneath every separate incident of anger, resentment, hostility, and irritation lies a single reflex in the mind which says, “I don’t like this! Hit back.”

Greed – not only for money but for material possessions, for pleasure, for power – is another root *samskara* in the deeper consciousness of us all. It may show itself in different ways, but the drive is the same: we feel incomplete, so we try to manipulate things and people to get what we can to fill the vacuum inside us.

As meditation deepens we begin to recognize these ways of thinking in ourselves, and it may seem as if meditation has brought them on. I can assure you, they have been there all along; we simply haven’t noticed them. Only as the mind begins to clear can we look down through the glass-bottomed boat that is meditation and see these monsters lurking below.

When we find ourselves face to face with a *samskara* in meditation, there is no need to get rattled or try to run away. This is what you have been training for. A kind of Madison Square Garden has been rented in the mind, and we are in the

ring. Every morning's meditation begins another round. But to win, we have to carry the fight out of meditation and into daily living. Samskaras may originate in the mind, but they express themselves in words and actions. To oppose them, we have to learn not to act on them – not to do what our compulsions demand.

This is terribly difficult; otherwise, a compulsion would not be a compulsion. But there is Job's consolation in knowing that we cannot run away. We may want to jump out of the ring and make for Brooklyn, but there is no Brooklyn in the mind. The samskara is inside us; wherever we go, it has to follow. Even if we refuse to fight, the Bhagavad Gita says, our very nature will impel us into situations where we have no choice. When we are against the ropes with a burly samskara and cannot escape, reason and self-respect agree: Why not make a good job of it and try to win?

Whatever romantic notions we may have about spiritual growth, it never really happens in a short time. Like the Thirty Years' War, this war within goes on and on. There is so much to transform! Naturally there come times when the mind gets tired and complains. "Why not call it off for a while?" This cannot be done. Once we come face to face with a samskara in deeper consciousness, we are in the ring with it until we win. As my grandmother used to tell me, "The Lord will never put on your shoulders even one pound more than you can bear. But," she would always add, "you will never have to carry one pound less, either." Otherwise we would not grow.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

In this reading, Easwaran is presenting samskaras as firmly entrenched habits of negative thinking, and he suggests that meditation will gradually bring us the capacity to transform these negative thoughts into positive ones: "When your meditation is progressing well, if your mind goes into a negative mood – about yourself, about your problems, about other people, about the state of the world – you should be able to switch your attention away from the negative and focus it on the positive."

Whether we are dealing with surface distractions or with the deepest samskaras, all that is required of us is this effort to transform negative to positive.

What does this mean in daily life? When we switch our attention away from the negative and focus it on the positive, how does that help us and others? In many places, Easwaran emphasizes that this positive focus is not a "Pollyanna" approach in which we neglect to deal with negative situations. Rather, it is a constructive approach. Reflect on your experience. Are there some situations that would benefit if you paid more attention to the positive? How might

you do that, using the Eight Points? In what way would you need to be careful not to “gloss over” problems, but to deal with them both positively and constructively?

Watching the Talk

When it's time for inspiration, please read the following introduction and watch the first talk on the DVD, “The Spiritual Fight.”

Easwaran is commenting on the last chapter of the Dhammapada, in which the Buddha tells us to cross the river bravely – to face and overcome our inner obstacles on the path of *sadhana*, or spiritual practice. A person who practices spiritual disciplines is considered a *sadhak*.

Later in the talk, Easwaran presents the tools we need most for this difficult challenge. He says that meditation is a tool for giving us accurate long-distance vision – to understand the long-term consequences of our attitudes and actions. That gives us motivation to change our *samskaras*, our ingrained negative habits. And the mantram helps us to make day-to-day improvements in those attitudes by giving us access to deeper consciousness.

Conclude with thirty minutes of meditation.

LESSON THREE

This week we are continuing our study of Chapter Six in *Conquest of Mind*, in which Sri Easwaran is examining the interior obstacles – called samskaras – that keep us from knowing ourselves as we really are.

In this lesson we'll focus especially on how samskaras affect our vision – the way we see ourselves and others. As meditation deepens and we learn to look past our conditioning to glimpse the best in ourselves and others, a world of new possibilities opens before us.

Reading

Eventually, we are trying to extend the influence of morning meditation until it becomes like a thread running through the day. Then there is a continuous connection between meditation and daily living. The timeless values on which we are meditating begin to transform every word and action. And in turn, meditation improves. When we try to show goodwill to everyone, to work harmoniously even with those from whom we differ, we find to our delight that meditation deepens swiftly.

Samskaras have a way of fogging vision so that what we want looks like what is really best, and what is right looks out of the question. In this kind of fog everyone needs a friend with clear vision who can block the path to disaster and say no. That is one function of a spiritual teacher.

In the countryside where I live there is a long road consisting mostly of bumps and potholes. On one side is what appears to be solid ground, covered by tall grass and California poppies. Actually all this growth conceals a deep ditch, which might qualify for the *Guinness Book of Records* for the number of cars, trucks, and even tractors that have fallen into it and had to be hauled out. One friend of mine got concerned about this and posted a discreet sign that said euphemistically, "Soft Shoulder." But vehicles kept buttressing the Guinness claim. After a year or so, my friend dropped the euphemisms and delicate lettering. Now there is a big sign that warns clearly, "DITCH!"

A samskara is not a soft shoulder; it is a deep ditch. If we get stuck in one – an addiction, a recurring personal problem, a compulsive relationship – we should count ourselves fortunate to be hauled out, even if the price is heavy. And if someone we know is about to fall into a ditch like this, it is not very loving to say, "Well, if I were you I'd consider changing my direction. But I don't want to infringe on your freedom of choice." It is not much of a sign of friendship just to say "Good

luck!” and offer the address of a good garage. Even if the other person will not speak to us for a week or so, we should have enough love in our hearts to block his way. Then we can offer support while helping him to correct his negative samskara – not by preaching, but by our own example.

Here we encounter an interesting quirk of human nature: often the things we want most to correct in others are things we do ourselves. I hear both sides of this in my privileged role as spiritual teacher. A friend will come and confide to me, “That Eunice is so unkind! You’ll never believe what she just said to me.” I reply gently, “Do you remember when we met Eunice at the Bijou last month? That is just the way you talked to *her*.”

Sooner or later, the Buddha would say, the way we behave to others has to come back to us. That is the meaning of that much-misunderstood phrase “the law of karma.” If we want people to be kind, the very best way is to learn to respond to others’ needs exactly as if they were our own. No one likes to be treated rudely, to be rushed or belittled or ignored. Everyone appreciates patience, kindness, forgiveness, and respect.

As we practice this, we forget ourselves little by little – our problems, our little personal desires, our conveniences, our opinions – not only during the day but in meditation too. Then, when we sit down to meditate, there are no more distractions about our income tax or the letter we owe Aunt Julie. “Like bees returning to the hive,” Saint Teresa of Avila says beautifully, “which shut themselves up to work at making honey,” all our thoughts gather on the words of the meditation passage and remain absorbed there, deepening our awareness for the day to come.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

In this reading, Easwaran makes a provocative statement about the way we see life: “Samskaras have a way of fogging vision so that what we want looks like what is really best, and what is right looks out of the question.”

Have you observed this dynamic in yourself? Remember the definition of two major samskaras that we read last week:

“Most of us have an anger samskara: an automatic response to want to lash out at others or ourselves when things do not go our way. At critical moments like these, it can be most helpful to remember that the disturbance has little to do with, say, whether someone took our parking place or we had to wait in line at the grocery

store. Beneath every separate incident of anger, resentment, hostility, and irritation lies a single reflex in the mind which says, 'I don't like this! Hit back.'

"Greed – not only for money but for material possessions, for pleasure, for power – is another root samskara in the deeper consciousness of us all. It may show itself in different ways, but the drive is the same: we feel incomplete, so we try to manipulate things and people to get what we can to fill the vacuum inside us."

Have you noticed the action of these samskaras in yourself and others? When they are active, how do they affect your vision? How can you use the Eight Points to free yourself of their influence and clear your vision?

Watching the Talk

When it's time for inspiration, please read the following introduction and watch the second of the two talks on the DVD, "Seeing Life Clearly."

In the reading we are studying this month, Easwaran says that we can deepen our meditation by reducing the degree to which we dwell on ourselves. In tonight's talk, he's giving us a careful exploration of how we can do that by learning to see life clearly.

This talk was given on the occasion of the Buddha's birthday. So Easwaran takes up several of the points of the Buddha's Eightfold Path, especially:

Right Understanding: seeing life as it is, so that we can have rich, permanent relationships based on true understanding.

Right Purpose: having a high spiritual purpose to help us make wise decisions.

Right Speech: learning to speak in a way that is pleasing to the ear and pleasing to the heart.

During the talk, Easwaran refers to a South Indian dance concert he had attended in Berkeley the night before with many of his friends.

Conclude with thirty minutes of meditation.

LESSON FOUR

In this week's reading we return to the main theme of Chapter Six in *Conquest of Mind*: every activity in our day has a role to play in deepening our spiritual life.

Sri Easwaran's path is one of active engagement with the world around us, contributing our best to family, workplace, community, and world, while maintaining a calm center within, peaceful and friendly even under trying circumstances. One of the vital necessities for such a life is sound rest and deep meditation. In this last part of the chapter, Easwaran draws a portrait of a truly restorative evening and night, which soothes the heart and inspires the mind, preparing us for the next morning's meditation and a fulfilling day to follow. In our reflection questions, we'll give some thought to how we can establish such a haven of well-being in our daily schedule.

Reading

The thread of meditation running through your day can be extended into the evening too. If you want to go forward even in your sleep, I can share a secret which I learned over a period of ardent experimentation. Have your evening meditation reasonably early so that you have time for half an hour or so of spiritual reading before you go to sleep. And choose your reading carefully. It should be positive, strengthening, and inspiring, and it should be more than just good literature or philosophy; it should be a piece of scripture which you respond to deeply, or writing stamped with the personal experience of a great mystic. Read a little, slowly and reflectively, giving the words a chance to sink deep into your consciousness. Then put the book aside, turn out the light, and fall asleep repeating your mantram: *Jesus Jesus, Rama Rama, Barukh attah Adonai*, whatever it may be.

It may take time, but gradually this sequence of meditation, spiritual reading, and falling asleep in the mantram will become a smooth current that goes on flowing in consciousness even while you sleep. As meditation deepens, you may find you have a remarkable night life. You may hear the words of your meditation passages reverberating in your mind, or hear the mantram being sung with a kind of unearthly beauty. You may dream of what you have been reading: you may see Saint Francis, for example, in your dreams, strengthening your heart or giving some practical advice. All this can be deeply inspiring, as if you had actually been in Saint Francis's holy company or heard the words of the Shema from the lips of Moses himself.

Even the kind of night we have, then, is of our own choice. If you have been kind throughout the day, turning your back when necessary on personal likes and dis-

likes, and then given your best in meditation and fallen asleep in the mantram, you will go forward even while you sleep. Even in sleep we can be shaping our lives!

In this way, with meditation and daily living supporting each other, your spiritual growth will be swift and sure.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

This portrait of an ideal evening routine is very inviting, but can seem like a distant dream for anyone with a busy life and many responsibilities. It is rarely successful to try to change one's evening routine all at once. Rather, as Easwaran often said, it's best to start *poco a poco*, little by little.

If you were to change one small part of your daily routine to make such an evening possible, what would it be? In the long run, where in your life might you apply the discipline of Slowing Down, so that you'd have more time for such evenings? Right now, your life may be too busy to contemplate a major change in your level of activity, but there might be a time in the future when that would be more possible. What might you do to prepare yourself for such a time, using the Eight Points?

Reading for Inspiration

When it's time for inspiration, please read Chapter Ten of *The Mantram Handbook*, "The Goal of Life."

Conclude with thirty minutes of meditation.

THE SPIRITUAL FIGHT

October 27, 1979, Part One

This is the concluding chapter of the Dhammapada, which is of paramount importance to all of us because the Buddha is summing up all the characteristics of a true *sadhak*, a true spiritual aspirant, who has an all-consuming desire to cross the sea of *samsara* and attain nirvana.

When put into daily language, what it means is when we keep our eyes focused always on the supreme goal and every day refrain from doing everything that impedes us and take care to do everything that helps us, almost all of us can go a long, long way on the spiritual path. In other words, there may be some who feel at times they don't have the dedication, they don't have the determination, to fulfill their sadhana. It is to such people that the Buddha is addressing himself when he says, "You can increase your dedication. You can increase your determination. You can deepen your enthusiasm and draw on your meditation morning and every evening and by using the mantram whenever you can, it's possible for everybody to become a dedicated sadhak – a sadhak with sustained enthusiasm.

For the last two or three talks, I've been freely drawing upon Einstein, not only because the world is celebrating his centenary but also because you'll see, from what I have been quoting recently, that very often he speaks the same way as the Buddha speaks; he speaks the same way as Gandhi speaks. That is why he was so deeply drawn to Mahatma Gandhi. And if I hadn't read it today and not looked at the author, I would have found it difficult to believe that this is not from the Buddha or Gandhi. "The way to a joyful and happy existence is everywhere through renunciation and self-limitation." Limiting our wants, limiting our needs – which is the language of Saint Francis of Assisi, the language of Saint Teresa of Avila, the language of the Buddha, the language of Mahatma Gandhi.

Well I might also add a light touch. At a dinner party which he was attending in this country, there was a nice gentleman seated on one side and a very nice American girl of eighteen seated on the other. So the nice gentleman, to make the conversation easy, asked Professor Einstein what exactly he was doing. And Einstein looked at him and said – he was very pleased that he wasn't aware of who he was. He said, "Oh, I devote my life to the study of physics." And the young girl, who was Jessica's age, she too wanted to contribute to the conversation. She looked at Einstein's hair, which was white, and she said, "I finished studying physics last year."

"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. See, after many years of sadhana now, the time is come for some of the samskaras slowly to raise their not-very-pretty heads above the surface level of consciousness. And from the conversation that I've been having with a number of people on this subject,

this is the time to be really happy about it. This is what we have been training for, what we have been looking for, what we have been waiting for. And when the samskara, in the finest condition possible, training in the subterranean gymnasium under a very accomplished coach, Master Ego, when the samskara comes up, he's so confident that he says, "Hello, Jeff. Would you like a friendly fight?"

That is no time to run out. Then you shouldn't have taken to meditation. You should have been reading poetry at City Lights. That's no time to complain. The right answer is, Jeff should say, "It is my pleasure." He says, "Well, you don't look in very good condition." "Oh yes," he says, "I agree. I am not in the best condition possible but I am not going to let you alone till I knock you out."

And there will be many matches, many challenges, many tournaments, but ultimately, as they say in boxing, there will be two thuds: One, when Jeff lands the right blow; second, when the ego hits the right ground. Ultimately, this is the climax for every true sadhak. And if you feel inadequate, if you try to run away, if you complain, if you indulge in wailing and gnashing of teeth, you are defeating the very purpose for which all the training has been undertaken. And the samskara, there is only one way to learn to fight the samskara – by fighting.

See, I don't know anything about boxing. But from some of the stray remarks I read in the papers, that boxers sometimes have a bad time until they learn how their opponent works. And you're going to get a lot of unpleasant touches from the opponent for some time. You have to know when you get this kind of urge. What are the circumstances in which this overcomes you? And when this urge comes over you, what do you do? How do you act? How do you speak? Who all get the brunt of it? And how long does it last? See, this is how you learn how the samskara works.

And the Buddha, therefore, gives the first qualification: "Cross the river bravely." Just as when we are crossing a river – particularly in my village, during the monsoon, when the river was in flood, that's the time we want to cross it. Not when it was dry. Imagine saying, "Come on, fellows, it's very good to cross the river that is dry because it's all safe." Why not cross the sand pit in your own courtyard? And the river is flooded. It may present many problems. And you first decide that you're going to cross the river. And in crossing the river, particularly in my village, we would go and slowly step into the water and see how strong the current is. And before getting into the depths, we'll try to find out where exactly we have got to land, how much leeway we have to provide, what would be the strength of the current. And we usually would be together with a few friends. I don't think I ever did it alone. Nor have I seen ordinary boys like me doing it alone. And that's the value of *satsang*.

[Section Two]

And when you are with people, when you're working with people harmoniously, when you're talking to people kindly, as we try to do with so many of us, what happens is you are slowly stepping into the stream. And you learn how to work cheerfully and harmoniously, even with those who have differences with you. You learn to work under unfavorable circumstances cheerfully. And you learn to work not at what you like but you learn to like what you do. This is something that I learned from my teacher, though she didn't know how to phrase it. She always enjoyed whatever she was doing. And in those days, I always did what I enjoyed. This is only a small difference between us in outlook.

And even Einstein has a marvelous remark to make when he says, "Whenever anybody contradicted me" – and there were plenty of scientists who contradicted him, right up to the last day – this great scientist says, "I would go home and think over what the other person had said, understand what exactly he was trying to convey. And if I found that I was wrong, I'd be so delighted!" That's the expression he uses, you see. "I'd be so delighted that Niels Bohr or Oppenheimer had helped me to avoid an error." Now look at the vast majority of human beings, scientists, artists, do-nothings. If you contradict them, they get upset. They go to their room and think of all the things that are negative about the person who contradicts.

And here again, we can cultivate a certain detachment where opinions are concerned. And having been on many universities, it hasn't come very easily to me. See, so I would suggest we try to practice this. You don't have to go and ask people to contradict you. There'll be plenty of volunteers to perform that service. And when somebody contradicts you, even about your pet opinions, that's the time you could think a little over it, weigh it in the balance and if you find that Jim is right, go and express your joy to Jim. That's Einstein speaking as a person who is crossing the stream. This very simple secret can guard us against so much agitation.

And I used to learn it from my teacher. See, for example, in those very immature and foolish days, when I did not understand her stature and I misunderstood the stature of all my peers at school, who will say . . . I'll come and repeat something which my granny told me and they will say the Malayalam version of "you believe all these old granny's tales?" And I used to think they were right. After all, sixteen is an infallible age where glands are concerned. And I'd go and contradict my Granny. Of course, I used to do it very nicely by saying, "Of course, Granny, you never went to school. How can you know this?" And it's only later on, when I began to meditate, that I could recall she'd just sit on her mat and laugh. And it was rarely that she laughed. When I would say things like that, "You never went to school, Granny. How can you know all these abstruse matters?" She'd just laugh and she neither defended herself nor tried to get annoyed.

That's how I began to understand that this is how most of us can avoid agitation. Usually, there is no need to get into an argument. But there are some times, there are occasions sometimes

when we do get into arguments. And most of the agitation is not because of the argument. It is because of the agitation. If you want to see how mature a person is, contradict him. You know, in the early days, when I was carrying on this work, this is how I used to give my midterm. Take somebody, saying, "Let's have an enjoyable walk." And then halfway round Lake Merritt, make some critical remarks about that person's pet doctrines. And I just used to watch how much agitation there was. Afterwards, he wasn't even listening to me. And it's a very easy way to observe how people are doing in sadhana.

In order to evaluate sadhana, no occult powers are necessary at all. Just look at the table, how the pizza is going. That's all. Test number one. Test number two – contradict a person very politely and see what happens. Sometimes, you know, their concentration wavers so much that you can make a very kind remark and they won't hear. So, I'm giving you . . . I've got hundreds of midterms and finals. Don't think that these are the only ones. This is how you can start evaluating yourself, you see. And mature people have to learn to like what they do. Immature people can carry on, can go on doing what they like. So that is how I would explain the term, "brave." See, sometimes in the papers, even in the olden days, the papers or in the magazines, I would hear about somebody being called very brave because he laid down his life. I would say, "Oh, yes. But, according to the Buddha, it demands much greater courage to live for others, to forget oneself, to make one's life a contribution to all those around."

The next is: "Conquer all your passions." What he is talking about here in practice is, don't keep listening to your thoughts. This is another simple observation that we can make about ourselves. Some people have their headphones. Isn't that what you call them? Headset. They will sit, they will put on their headset and listen to all that is going on in their mind. Naturally, their attention is not turned outwards, they exaggerate what is taking place, they see what is not there, they do not see what is there.

And the Buddha says, this is like – in my language – like correcting your vision. Just as, you know, when you go to an eye examination. In our school, we used to get the eye doctor to come and give an examination to all of us. And everybody would start so well and rapidly with the first line, you know, "Zed, D, Y, X . . ." And second line also, the speed will get less but they'll go through. And it used to be such an interesting study for me. After the third or fourth: "Is it an L or an M?" "Looks like P to me." And the last line, they say, "We give up." And there is a kind of mental blindness, too. Just as the eye can be blind, the mind can be blind. And when we are brooding over ourselves, when we are thinking about ourselves, we can read thoughts wrongly. We can misunderstand matters.

And the answer, according to the Buddha, is get your mental vision corrected. Isn't it said about professors that they need three pairs of glasses – one to read from the Dhammapada, another to look into the distance, and a third, to look for these two pairs? And similarly, meditation is very good for long vision: Whatever the consequences of certain acts, of certain attitudes, we can put on those steel-rimmed spectacles and look far and we will see: this particular pleasure,

this particular bout of self-will, it is going to lead to those awful consequences. It is because we don't see them that when we see those consequences, we say, "Oh, no. We don't want this." That is meditation.

Then for short vision, to know this is Gale and not Rosemary: mantram. Immediate, you see. If you want immediate help, you can have the mantram. And meditation, remember, can help to solve very long-standing problems. The mantram is cash, ready cash.

The third is, "Go beyond the world of fragments." Again, in my language, if you want to love, you cannot be a fragment because a fragment cannot love. Love means loving all. In fact, I am going to introduce a new kind of phraseology now. I don't even now understand somebody saying, "I am a lover." If you say, "I am a lover," it means you love everybody. Otherwise, Romeo must say that "I love one particular girl whom I ran into at a disco party." Must limit itself. And if you want to say, "I love," then it must be everybody, not only your family but all around; not only your country but the whole world; not only people with whom you get along but also people with whom you do not get along. And now you're swimming towards the other bank, as you find that everyone is your kith and kin. And as your life becomes an eloquent expression of your love for all, you see the other bank.

SEEING LIFE CLEARLY

May 13, 1979

We are celebrating the birthday of one of the greatest spiritual teachers the world has produced, the Compassionate Buddha. And it is very easy to understand why his appeal is widening and deepening in the modern world, because he goes so much by reason and so much by compassion that every one of us can respond to his mighty head and also to his mighty heart.

Last evening when we were all attending a great concert in Berkeley I looked upon that as a very worthy celebration of the message of the Buddha in song and dance, but this evening – not having their gift for song and dance – I shall try to place before you the Noble Eightfold Path, combining the sweet reasonableness of the Buddha and even the sweeter compassion of the Buddha. He calls his Noble Eightfold Path *dukkha nirodha gamini pati pada* – the way that leads to the end of sorrow. And it's good for all of us to remember the title of the first volume of the Gita, *The End of Sorrow*, which is almost the same phrase that the Buddha uses. Do you want to put an end to your sorrow? Do you want to bring an end to the suffering in the world? Then he says, you can do so and you can make your lasting contribution by following the Noble Eightfold Path, which consists of right understanding, right purpose, right speech, right conduct, right occupation, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation.

Let us take the first step on the Eightfold Path, which the Buddha calls *samma ditthi*, right understanding. There is a good deal of reason in this approach and there is a good deal of compassion, as I said, because it means if you see somebody who is very unkind, who thinks only about himself or herself, the Buddha would say that is how that person sees life. It's almost like a person suffering from myopia. He doesn't see life as we do and I used to have a girl student of mine who had some kind of astigmatism which she said made everybody look very pleasant. Actually, she used to tell me I don't want any glasses because when I correct my vision some of these fellows in my class look awful. And the Buddha is trying to tell us: Don't blame that person for being short-sighted – try to help that person to correct his or her vision.

Aldous Huxley, you know, the author of *The Perennial Philosophy* who meditated with Swami Prabhavananda in the Benares of America, L.A., he was actually about to be sent down from Oxford, because he couldn't see. He couldn't even see to read. And it shows the spirit of Aldous Huxley and his love of knowledge that even though he was told by specialists that his chances were nil, that there was no way of improving his eyesight, he went on experimenting. As you know, he was a very ardent student of mysticism, where it is maintained that even the functions of the body can be changed to a reasonable extent through physical exercise, called Hatha Yoga, through mental exercises called meditation. And he went in for some of these exercises. And I think he has even a little book . . . written a little book called – does anybody know the name of the book? A little book based on the success of his experiments. And when I read his very interesting biography recently I was astounded to see how many books he was able to

read, how much reading he used to accomplish every day, which shows how much we can do through physical exercises, through changing mental attitudes.

Even seeing, as you know, is not just physical; the mind also comes into play. Now, the Buddha would say, people who are unkind, they don't see others. People who are unkind, they don't see the rights of others. People who are selfish, they are blind. And the people who are self-willed, they are purblind. And the answer is: to help them with exercises, which is what meditation is, *japam* is, which is what the Noble Eightfold Path is. See, for example, when you have to deal with difficult people like yourself, I would suggest, you know, that you don't get angry, you don't try to avoid them, you don't use disrespectful language, and you don't connive at their selfishness, either. It's a very difficult art to learn, but it can help everybody.

In Buddhist metaphysics, there are two terms, two ways of knowing, called *anubodha* and *pativedha*. As usual, the Buddha will use such simple terms with such precision. He will say, we are all half-blind, because we follow *anubodha*, which is seeing people as they look to us, acting towards people as they look to our mind. *Anu* means accordingly and *anubodha* means you behave towards other people in accordance with the way they appear to you. It's a very simple, but a very far-reaching way of accounting for our difficulties in not being kind to others, in not showing respect to others because we are really not seeing them. We are seeing our images of them. We are dealing with our projections of them.

You must have been seeing me prowling about with a little camera trying to photograph the lilac? The lilac bushes, you know, they don't move, they don't complain. I don't have to say, "Say cheese." And I got some pretty good pictures of the lilac bushes. One of the simple mechanisms in my camera is: all that I need is to bring both the images together. As soon as both the images come together, I know there are not two Brians; there is only one. Actually one of Brian's friends in India, a fellow American traveler, he asked Brian, "What's your name?" Brian said, "Brian." And the man said, "There are too many Brians in this world." What the Buddha is appealing to us is: just as you focus your camera, you don't take a picture when everything is fuzzy, when there are too many Brians. You look at your light meter and then walk up and down and get a proper angle; you stand facing the object; and then you click the camera and you get a good picture.

Similarly, the Buddha says, focus your attention on that person's needs, concentrate your attention on that person's needs, and then speak and act by remembering that if that person were to be unkind to you you'd be terribly hurt. If that person were to be rude to you you'd be agitated even in your sleep. Just remember that and be kind, be good. And you'll get a good picture.

[Section Two]

So, anubodha is likely to be unkind – going by our feelings, going by our hunches. And there are people, you know, they look at you and say, “Yes, yes, that’s how you must be feeling.” That’s not how you are feeling; that’s how they think you are feeling. That’s how they are feeling that you’re feeling. I am trying to show you how easy the Buddha makes us to understand that all we have got to do is to remember their needs, not our needs. We say, “We have a capacity for brooding.” Oh, sure, the Buddha says, use it to brood on their requirements, keep on brooding: What does Stuart want? And you’ll find that you are able to conduct yourself very well towards Stuart.

The other way of knowing is pativedha, where you don’t go by appearances. Here, most of us: Oh, Richard does look a little disgruntled today, let’s keep off his track. And Ed, he looks withdrawn because he’s writing. He looks withdrawn, so let us try to go away from him. Most of us, I must confess, this is how we behave. We, as Patanjali would say, we study the mind from external behavior; this is what most modern social sciences deal with. Pativedha is going into the heart of the other person, entering the personality of the other person. Pativedha: penetrative knowledge.

It is possible to develop it through the practice of meditation accompanied by attempting to put others first. That’s how pativedha is developed and it becomes very, very enjoyable you know. You are dealing with somebody who has serious differences, you are dealing with somebody who is difficult in living with and what you do is jump from your personality into the other person’s personality, which is possible only when you can remove your self-will, you can push your ego out. You’ll find – this is the great hallmark of the great mystics – they’ll be able to stand in your shoes and say; that is how he became like this, this is how she became like this. All judgment ceases, all animadversion ceases. Superior, inferior – all these become meaningless. And the first step, right understanding of life, comes through pativedha – putting other people first, putting yourself in other people’s shoes, first.

The second is *samma sankappa*: right purpose. You have only to look around yourself wherever you go, read the papers and the magazines every day to see that we have no framework of reference. We have no framework to refer any action to any context. You can see some highly intelligent people, very gifted people doing absurd things, wasting their time and their energy and their precious life. They have great intellects, they have received long training, but they have no frame of reference. In order to have a frame of reference we need an overriding purpose in life. Without an overriding purpose in life, life is meaningless – whatever advances in technology we make or whatever strides we make in the sciences.

The Buddha, therefore, says – just like the Gita – have nirvana as your purpose. As the Gita says, have union with me, Sri Krishna says, as your purpose. And you’ll find everything that comes up during the day so easy to understand, so feasible to evaluate, and so helpful to decide.

Now thanks to many years of dedicated sadhana I must confess that I don't have any difficulties in understanding what the choices are. This is half the battle in life: does this help those around me? Then it does not matter whether it is painful, or whether it is boring, or whether it is tedious, I am going to do it and do it cheerfully. Is it at the expense of everybody around? Does it show scant respect for those around me? Does it fail to make a contribution to those around us? It doesn't matter how much money there is, how much profit there is or how much prestige. It's very good to do things which are in the interest of all and it's very good not to do things which are not in the interest of all. You'll find every little issue will fall into place. There's no need for cogitation and controversy. It all becomes, as the scriptures say, "direct knowledge." You immediately know. You may have difficulty in making the choices, but you don't have any difficulty in understanding the choices. Right purpose can also be called by Saint Teresa's favorite word, *determinación*.

The third is, which is very important for me, maybe because I have been a schoolteacher for many, many years: right speech. In my home my grandmother was very, very emphatic about this. Not one word could we use that lacked in courtesy, that lacked in respect and as a result I've become almost intuitively sensitive to right speech. I enjoy right speech. I like to listen to people who present a different point of view persuasively, with courtesy and with a touch of humor. And I can attend a very eloquent lecture on atheism, laugh at all the right places, and then come out by the same door I went in.

In most of our modern means of communication we seem to have lost the desire for right speech. Everywhere it is wrong speech that is practiced. It is wrong speech that is taught, wrong speech that is written. And we can all cultivate in our own home, in our own personal relations, right speech: clear, concise, very personal, and very compassionate. In this connection I would say again, don't talk negatively about people. Today a friend was consulting me about it and I said, "The nicest advice I can give is, 'What about you, don't you have negative qualities about you? Don't you see other people with positive qualities?'"

So when you see people having negative qualities, just remember – just as you have a few negative qualities, they too have a few negative qualities. It's good for both to concentrate on the positive qualities, and not to speak derisively and deprecatingly about other people and their negative qualities.

And it was said of Gandhiji that he was at his best among people who differed from him. This is a very good test. You know we are all at our best when everybody says, "How right you are, couldn't be righter." I would say, look at yourselves when both of your friends are saying, "You couldn't be wronger. How do you get these ideas? Do they come to you of their own accord?" On the one hand, it shouldn't shake your security. My observation is it is people who are insecure who get obstreperous in communication. They get very insecure. They think that

maybe they've picked up some tinsel, bought some costume jewelry under the mistake that they were Japanese pearls. They get all insecure and discourtesy is the stamp of insecurity.

So, the Buddha says, be courteous; it will make you secure. Be more secure; it will make you more courteous. And I've forgotten the exact phrase, which has been a great favorite of mine from the Buddha. He says, you can so learn the art of right speech that you can say things that are pleasing to the ear and pleasing to the heart. It's a very rare combination where we learn to please the ear and to please the heart.

VERSE

Chinda sotam parakkamma kame panuda brahmana
sankharanam khayam natva akatannu si brahmana

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

Dhammapada, Chapter Twenty-six, verse one

TERMS & REFERENCES

City Lights A bookstore in San Francisco.

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

nirvana [*nir* “out” *va* “to blow”] Extinction of selfish desire and selfish conditioning. Enlightenment, Self-realization.

Patanjali Ancient Indian sage and philosopher. Author of the Yoga Sutras.

sadhak A spiritual aspirant.

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

samsara The world of flux; the round of birth, decay, death, and rebirth.

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

satsang Spiritual fellowship

Swami Prabhavanda Monk of the Ramakrishna Order who lived and taught in Southern California.

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