

THE TALKS OF EKNATH EASWARAN

31

Go Beyond the World of Fragments
Preparing for Life's Finals

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 the chapter from *Conquest of Mind* that we'll be studying this month, Sri Easwaran is talking about one of his favorite subjects – how small choices add up to make a big difference in our life. The chapter title, “Tremendous Trifles,” sums up his approach: working on small matters *is* working on big matters.

In our lessons we'll be examining the dynamics of such conscious choice-making, which involves several spiritual skills. One is memory, which allows us to remember our spiritual aspirations at the time we are making a choice. Another skill is to aim high – to keep our eyes on the long-term direction of our life. This enables us to direct our attention more to *how* we act rather than *what we'll get* from our action. And the third skill is to learn to forget ourselves – to look past the little ups and downs, cravings, and irritations that swirl around our self-will, so as to better understand and love the people around us.

As we acquire these three skills we start to see opportunities everywhere, and the trifling occurrences of life reveal a tremendous capacity for satisfaction and joy.

Reading

The movie *Murder by Death*, a spoof with some of fiction's most famous detectives, opens with a strange scene. Alec Guinness, a favorite of mine, plays an old, blind butler who comes in with a sheaf of envelopes to which he must affix stamps. He puts the envelopes to one side, and the camera, with surrealistic flair, shows only a wide-open mouth with the tongue sticking out. Up comes the hand with the stamps one by one, and one by one the tongue licks the stamps and the hand returns to stick them to the envelopes. We hear the fist pounding lightly to make sure each stamp is secure. Then, after the entire sheaf has been gone through, the camera backs up and we see all the stamps – carefully affixed to the desk.

All of us are capable of this if we do not pay attention to little things. Don't you have a saying that if we take care of the little things, the big things will take care of themselves? It may sound trite, yet even people with the best of intentions and the soundest of plans often fail because they overlook details that turn out to matter. If you want to see someone who will succeed, watch for the rare man or woman who takes pains over each small step.

G. K. Chesterton has a book called *Tremendous Trifles*. I find that a very apt phrase. There are a large number of tremendous trifles in life. We think they are trifles until we look back and add them up; then we discover that taken as a whole, their effect has been tremendous. It is the same with spiritual growth. Most of us who

are serious about training the mind try to be vigilant on major occasions; it is on little occasions that we forget. Yet it is on these thousands of little occasions that the mind is taught to be calm and kind: not instantaneously or by great leaps, but in the ordinary choices of the day.

The Buddha, the most practical of teachers, defined the wise man or woman in a thoroughly practical way: “One who will gladly give up a smaller pleasure to gain a greater joy.” That is discrimination, the precious capacity to see life clearly and choose wisely. When it is understood, every choice becomes an opportunity for training the mind.

When I first started meditating many, many years ago, in the midst of an active academic life, I had difficulty finding time for it. Most of my activities were harmless enough, but they were numerous and consumed a good deal of time and energy. I read a lot of books in those days, and much of what I read I don’t think was useful even for the literature classes I was teaching. I read those books because I enjoyed them and because I had been trained to believe that literature is for enjoyment. That was the appeal made by many important figures: literature for its own sake, art for its own sake.

As my meditation deepened, however, these attitudes began to change. Nothing, I realized, is for its own sake; everything is for life’s sake. This one insight simplified my priorities enormously. Immediately I began to prune my activities, lining out things that made no real difference to anybody, including myself. Today, everything I do from morning meditation on – eating breakfast, going for a walk, writing, reading, even recreation – is governed by one purpose only: how to give the very best account of my life that I can in the service of all.

That is what I mean by developing discrimination. At first it was difficult to make myself put my books aside an hour earlier to make time for evening meditation. Often my mind would protest, “Can’t we read just a little more?” Yet the joy that fills my life today cannot even be measured on the same scale as the pleasures I once held dear. Once we get even a taste of what meditation can do, we start looking for ways to make time for it no matter what comes in the way.

But there *are* smaller pleasures to be given up. I am not denying that on a cold morning, for instance, it is more pleasant to stay under the blankets than to get up early for meditation. The Buddha does not say to give up a small pain in favor of a greater joy; he says, “Give up a small pleasure.” That is the touch that makes him such a good teacher. Pulling the blankets over your head and lying there for ten minutes more *is* pleasant, but as pleasures go it doesn’t rate more than half a cent. Perhaps if you could stay under the covers forever . . . Yet even sleep loses its

attraction in time; that is the nature of life. So when you are tempted to stay in bed at the expense of meditation, remember these words: “Give up a small pleasure for a lasting joy.” Meditation will enhance everything in your life. It will follow you to work and make you calmer, more energetic, more creative, and more secure.

This apparently trifling difficulty of getting out of bed in the morning hides a tremendous truth. For most of us, it is a problem built up through little acts of omission. The alarm goes off and we sigh, “Oh, just five minutes more. It’s six o’clock; I’ll still be there for meditation at five minutes after.” That is how it begins. When you go on saying “five minutes after” every day for three hundred and sixty-five days, you develop what yoga psychology would call a five-minutes-after samskara – that is, a conditioned response that is not confined just to getting up. Everywhere you go, it will be your habit to be late and to postpone.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

The humorous image of stamps being stuck to a desk can be uncomfortably familiar to most of us. In the reading’s second paragraph, Easwaran reveals the point of it: “Don’t you have a saying that if we take care of the little things, the big things will take care of themselves? It may sound trite, yet even people with the best of intentions and the soundest of plans often fail because they overlook details that turn out to matter. If you want to see someone who will succeed, watch for the rare man or woman who takes pains over each small step.”

Please reflect on your day and identify a few instances when you are subject to “spiritual inattention” – when you do the spiritual equivalent of affixing stamps to the desk. It may be when you give an automatic, insensitive response to your family, or it may be when you find yourself finishing up a pie you had resolved not even to taste. As you reflect on those instances, try to determine how forgetfulness of your spiritual practice came into play.

This is not always a simple issue. Sometimes we may be intellectually aware that we’re making an unwise choice, but find ourselves incapable of changing course. Have you experienced that? At such times, we have “forgotten” or lost touch with something important inside, and so we can’t act according to our best judgment. Ask yourself, “What is it that, if I remembered it, would give me the power to consistently make wiser choices?” How might you use the Eight Points to remember it? Easwaran said that using the mantram regularly nourishes the faculty of memory by exercising it. How might increased capacity for memory affect your choice-making?

Reading for Inspiration

When it's time for inspiration, please read all of this chapter, "Tremendous Trifles," in *Conquest of Mind*.

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON TWO

This week we are continuing our exploration of conscious choice-making. We'll look at the dynamics of countering a negative habit with a wave of positive effort, and reflect on how a higher perspective can help us succeed at this.

We are reading from Chapter Seven, "Tremendous Trifles," in *Conquest of Mind*.

Reading

One powerful way to deal with this samskara – in fact, with any samskara – is to do just the opposite of what it demands. This is one of the surest ways to change a bad habit. The Buddha says, "Oppose a negative wave of thought with a positive wave of thought." It is such a simple, practical, effective strategy! The problem, of course, is that it is seldom very attractive.

Sometimes, walking at the beach when the tide is coming in, I will be striding along when a wave sweeps up, making me leap like a kangaroo to escape getting soaked. But when the tide and the contours of the shoreline are right, as the water is drawn back into the ocean it surges up in a backlash and crashes head-on into the next wave. There is a big explosion, and the oncoming wave is stopped cold.

Similarly, if a negative wave whispers to you one morning, "Just five minutes more . . . let's make it five after six," send a contrary wave back. Leap out of bed, and the next morning get up at five *to* six. Tell your mind, "If you like, you can even suggest six-thirty. I will get up at five-thirty and have my meditation." After a few mornings of this, I can assure you that your mind will have nothing more to say on the subject. This is the kind of language it understands. It is because we offer no resistance that the mind gradually begins to say "Fifteen after six" and finally, "Why not seven? It's a good, round number."

"Be reasonable," your mind may object. "Does a five-minutes-late habit do anybody any real harm?" First – and I want to emphasize this – the main issue is not the five minutes; it is training the mind. But it is important to understand that the mind's habits are not merely its own affair. Generally they affect other people in unsuspected ways as we move through the day.

I am a confirmed theater-goer, for example; I enjoy good plays and good acting. And I like to get to my seat early, mostly out of courtesy, but partly because I enjoy the human drama as the audience trickles in. On one memorable occasion the curtain went up and we were well into the opening scene when a couple stumbled

in and started looking for their seats, still absorbed in a heated discussion that must have begun out on the street. The gist of it was, where was the car? They had arrived at the last moment and rushed off without noticing where they had parked, and they kept on trying to settle the matter while stepping apologetically on half a row of toes. “Was it Franklin or Polk?” “Really, dear, I think it must have been Pine.” Most of us thought this was far more dramatic than the play. I was on the verge of saying, “Please go right up on the stage. If you can sing and dance too, that is all we could want.”

The same sort of scene takes place at classes, meetings, everywhere. A simple remedy is to make it a habit to go places early: we avoid making people wait for us, and we avoid interrupting them once they have started. In details like these, consideration for others becomes natural to a well-trained mind.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Let's try to understand how this strategy of “contrary waves” might work in our own life. Choose a small but persistent negative habit you'd like to change. If postponement applies to you, that might be a good habit to work with, but others are equally fruitful for study: sloppiness in work or housekeeping, self-indulgence in entertainment habits, etc. Choose a habit that you have tried to change, but which persists in spite of your efforts.

Now consider the contrary wave that you might send – or rather, which you will need to keep sending, over and over, if you want to change the habit. Clearly, a considerable constancy of effort will be needed to make this change permanent and create a new, positive habit. Sri Easwaran observed that when we feel strongly attracted to a spiritual ideal we are more likely to summon the will and energy needed for such constant effort. How might you increase that force of attraction to your ideal, and how might that improve your consistency? How might the Eight Points help you?

Watching the Talk

When it's time for inspiration, please read the introduction below, and play the first talk on the disc, “Go Beyond the World of Fragments.”

This talk was given on October 27, 1979. Nineteen seventy-nine was the hundredth anniversary of Einstein's birth, and Easwaran uses many anecdotes about Einstein to illustrate his theme (continued from the theme he began last month) of the spiritual fight – the contest between us and our old negative habits of thinking and acting.

This talk was given in the Blue Mountain Center's meditation hall, to which Easwaran refers. It is called *Shanti*, which means abiding peace, and that is the reward that comes when we've waged this spiritual fight.

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON THREE

We are continuing our study of the chapter entitled “Tremendous Trifles,” in *Conquest of Mind*. Our focus this week will be on building our will by engaging one of the deepest sources of motivation we have – our love for others.

Reading

Once you are out of bed and sitting for meditation, the mind will probably try to distract you. That is the next “tremendous trifle”: tremendous because what is at issue is not whether the subject of the distraction is big or small, good or bad, but the native distractibility of the mind.

Many people, for example, sooner or later encounter a sleeping problem in their meditation. After all, it is only natural to feel sleepy when the neuromuscular system begins to relax. And if you do doze off for a minute or two, what does it matter?

This is one subject on which I give hard-boiled advice: the moment you begin to feel sleepy, draw yourself up straight and resist. A problem with sleeping in meditation does not come one fine morning in July and ask, “May I join you?” It has been inching in, little by little by little. That is why vigilance is required right from the outset. Our impulse is to let the chin drop a little, let the spine sag, allow the words of the meditation passage to get blurry around the edges. Fight that impulse by doing just the opposite. The moment you begin to feel drowsy, draw away from your back support, sit up straight, and concentrate with all your might. When this kind of resistance becomes your natural response, you can overcome the problem of sleep even if it has been going on for months.

The mind has many, many cards like this up its sleeve. Most of us have a lot of things to attend to in the morning – some of which, it is true, we could have taken care of the night before – and of course we don’t want to forget to do something vital because we have run out of time and have to rush to work. “Therefore,” the mind will tell us with its own peculiar brand of logic, “why not cut meditation five minutes short and get started? What difference can five minutes make?” That is one thing you should never do. Here again, when the mind advises cutting out five minutes, smile benignly and add five minutes more.

This strategy of doing the opposite of what a conditioned impulse demands works beautifully with an eating problem. Everyone feels tempted when confronted with something tasty. Even if we are not really in need of sustenance, we often go

ahead and have a little extra. It is only human, you know. “Just one little piece,” the mind coaxes, “three inches by two.” There again, the answer is to make it *minus* three-by-two: take a smaller piece than you would have taken. The mind can really get offended by this kind of treatment, especially after many years of having its own way. But I assure you, if you stand firm on such issues the mind will come to have such respect for you that it will think several times before trying a trick like that again.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Sri Easwaran calls these spiritual challenges “tremendous trifles,” but they certainly don’t seem like trifles when we’re attempting them. To “do the opposite of what a conditioned impulse demands” is hard hard work, and when we set out to undertake it, we often find that our will resembles not so much a pillar of strength as a puddle.

So far this month, we’ve looked at two aids in this monumental struggle with trifles: memory and spiritual ideals. This week we’re going to explore a third – our innate desire to help others. Easwaran observes that habit change can come naturally, even easily, when we know that it will help someone we love. The power of that love is added to our will, giving us all the motivation we need to try and try again.

So this week, think again about that small but persistent habit you’d like to change. Is there some way in which changing that habit will benefit others? How might you keep your mind focused on that benefit, and the joy of giving it, when you are struggling to renew your motivation? What part can the Eight Points play in maintaining that focus?

Reading for Inspiration

When it’s time for inspiration, please read “The Forgotten Truth,” in *Climbing the Blue Mountain*.

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON FOUR

This week we conclude our study of Chapter Seven in *Conquest of Mind*, “Tremendous Trifles.” This last section shows us the “payoff” for all the work we’ve been doing on changing little habits. With the will and discrimination we’ve gained, we can heal and enhance our personal relationships in ways that we may never have dreamed possible.

Reading

This strategy of doing the opposite of what a conditioned impulse demands works beautifully with an eating problem. Everyone feels tempted when confronted with something tasty. Even if we are not really in need of sustenance, we often go ahead and have a little extra. It is only human, you know. “Just one little piece,” the mind coaxes, “three inches by two.” There again, the answer is to make it *minus* three-by-two: take a smaller piece than you would have taken. The mind can really get offended by this kind of treatment, especially after many years of having its own way. But I assure you, if you stand firm on such issues the mind will come to have such respect for you that it will think several times before trying a trick like that again.

With this strategy, we are learning a most valuable skill: we are gaining the will and the detachment not to act on impulse. Where this really pays off is in personal relationships, where acting on impulse spreads from individual to individual in countless little chain reactions throughout each day. Susan receives a letter from her mother-in-law announcing a two-week visit and she gets agitated; she cannot help it. Then she comes and says something curt to us, and we take it personally and put her on our blacklist for months. Most quarrels start with just this type of misunderstanding. It is so pointless.

When someone is unkind to us, we need not take it personally. Why should we? We are not getting hurt; if anyone is hurt, it is the other person. In India we put it picturesquely: when you are unkind to your neighbor, the cosmic auditor enters a debit for unkindness against *you*.

The rule to remember here is never to react immediately. That is the purpose of training the mind in all these other tremendous trifles. Whenever a negative emotion calls, put it on hold. Do not listen to its arguments. If you wait until all the evidence is in, there usually turns out to be no need to accept its charges, which can be heavy.

I know how hard it can be to put this rule into practice. Luckily, understanding it alone can help a great deal. Back in the days when I taught on a university campus, whenever people were curt to me I would get agitated, just as everybody does. Sometimes their sharp words could be defended; often they seemed unfair. But even when I could see their point of view I used to get agitated. Then I would recall that it is always the unkind person who pays inside, and I would begin to feel sorry for them. A little compassion would come in, and once compassion comes in, the desire to retaliate goes.

Sometimes, of course, it *is* necessary to make our differences of opinion clear. But even then it is rarely the differences themselves that make for unpleasantness; it is the arrogance with which these differences are often aired. “I am right. How can *you* possibly be right?” This is an almost universal attitude. A more appropriate approach, of course, is to concede, “There is something in what you say, and there is something in what I say. Why don’t we try to find this common something?” But to do this, the mind has to be taught not to go off on impulse. Reacting on impulse is just being a jukebox: someone puts in a quarter and out comes whatever outrageous song the mind wants to sing at the time.

Who wants to be dictated to by a jukebox mind? And who would let a jukebox upset him? That is a question we can always ask ourselves when adrenaline is beginning to flow. Here, a sense of humor and a sense of humility are of great help. Most people get offended easily because they have an inflated sense of dignity. But after all, if somebody does make a remark at our expense, how is our dignity affected? It is not against us that the debit entry is made. Simply by maintaining a sense of humor and humility, we can teach the mind not to get upset even when a real trial comes.

In small matters like these, gradually the mind can be effectively trained. At home, in meditation, at work, in moments of relaxation with family and friends, we can go against the conditioned caprices of the mind and gain, little by little, control of something which often seems nebulous and elusive: our own destiny.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

We have now reached the most tremendous trifle of all. To change habits in matters like desserts or procrastination may be hard enough, but to change the way we respond to unkind treatment often seems impossible. But that is exactly why we practice changing habits in other realms.

Let's review the skills we explored this month: One is memory, which allows us to remember our true Self at the time we are making a choice. Another skill is to aim high – to keep our eyes on the long-term direction of our life. This enables us to direct our attention more to *how* we act rather than *what we'll get* from our action. And the third skill is to learn to forget ourselves – to look past the little ups and downs, cravings, and irritations that swirl around our self-will, so as better to understand and love the people around us.

Please reflect now on a relationship in your life that you would like to improve or enhance. How might you use one or all of these three spiritual skills to deepen your understanding of the other person, and grow closer to him or her? Which of your habits that affect that relationship would you like to modify? How might your work in other “tremendous trifles” help you do that?

Watching the Talk

When it's time for inspiration, please read the following introduction and watch the second talk on this disc, “Preparing for Life's Finals.”

In this talk, given on October 7, 1978, Sri Easwaran uses two vivid metaphors to bring home the urgency of the spiritual life.

First, he refers to a movie he'd just seen, called *Who Is Killing the Great Chefs of Europe?* starring Robert Morley. It's a movie about a man obsessed with food, but Easwaran uses it as a cautionary illustration of what can happen to all of us when we don't learn to control our self-will and grow spiritually.

Second, he tells a delightful story from his student days to illustrate how important it is to attend to our spiritual life right now, and not postpone our “tremendous trifles” for some later time. Just as in college, the time for our final exams often comes much sooner in life than we expect. As he puts it, “Don't leave kindness for tomorrow, or selflessness for the day after tomorrow, or compassion for next week. Attend to it right away.” Meditation and the Eight Points can help us learn to do that, and to get, as Easwaran puts it, an A+ on life's finals.

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

GO BEYOND THE WORLD OF FRAGMENTS

October 27, 1979, Part Two

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.

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

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.” It 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.

Talking about fragments, for example. Now that Christmas is coming, most people are thinking in terms of gifts and I notice from the papers, now they are not even waiting for Thanksgiving. Already the season has started. And incidentally, somebody was telling me, which I should really be delighted to hear, that they are introducing celebrating Mother-in-Law's Day. Love! All the shops' storekeepers are now melting with love. And I think it is either today or tomorrow? It's today – we are celebrating Mother-in-Law's Day, which is what I mean. If they can celebrate Mother-in-Law's Day, why can't we celebrate Everybody's Day?

And for Christmas or for any occasion, I would say the best gift that all of us can give is kindness, every day. You can make every day a Christmas. And we all know how easily we still get upset. And how, when we get upset, we use unkind words. So even about Christmas, for example, you don't have to go to Cost Plus to buy your gifts.

I saw an advertisement by a well-known department store – not Mary's favorite store – which has advertised in the paper today, saying, “All the twelve stores will be open from morning till nine o'clock tonight so that you can save your money.” I put down the book. It was too far above my head. I put down the paper and thought very deeply for a long time over this new way of saving your money. I think, Jim, it was a printer's devil. Twelve places where you can blow your money. And it is so easy to give a gift. Somebody with whom you have been at odds – take the first step towards reconciliation and take all the other steps necessary. You've given a grand

Christmas gift. Where you have been suspicious of people, start trusting them. You've given a Christmas gift.

And there are so many varieties of these gifts that I don't think anybody need go anywhere to save their money on these gifts. In the olden days, I remember once I was walking down Shattuck and at some automobile store, there was a pointed slogan, saying, "This is buying time for you. This is crying time for me." And I wanted to write below, "This is crying time for you because it's not buying time for me." See, in all these we are showing love.

The next is again, see, repeating, "Cross the river bravely." When we find that we have conflicts in our mind, when we find that we have certain reservations in our mind, when we find that there is a certain negative ghost that haunts our mind now and then, that's the time to . . . [pushes up sleeves]. See, I am reminded of a college friend of mine, student friend of mine, with whom nobody would get into an argument, particularly people who did not know him very well. He was a very gentle fellow. But he had developed this habit, when you started arguing with him, of doing this [pushes up sleeves]. He'll go on doing this, you see. And everybody will say, "We agree with you."

In other words, when we see now the sources of some of our problems, they're really coming like – what do you call it? – jack-in-the-box, you know. A samskara is slowly coming up, looking us in the face and saying, "This is why you get angry." You say, "I thought Iago was the cause of my anger, or Caliban was the cause of my anger." "Oh no," the samskara says, "I. I make you angry." And you say, "How did you come?" "Oh, you made me. You massaged me and you gave me such good food – half a dozen bouts of anger every day, so many resentments. At midnight, you will say, 'Have a midnight snack!' And look at all these muscles! You got me an exercise cycle. I've got it in my gymnasium. I've got an exercise cycle, I've got a trampoline. And oh, I have developed so well and so strong that I would like to ask you, would you like to take me on?" That's why we are not able to go deep into our meditation.

And my suggestion now is you don't have to boast about it, or ask for trouble, but you just say, "Let's try. My muscles are not very good. I am not in good training but I have a dedication to a great cause that you do not have. So, let's try." And you may not even last the first bout. That's alright. There are going to be many, many more bouts. So when you haven't been able to deal with an emotional problem, don't give up. Don't get diffident. Keep working at it all the time. And one day, the gala occasion comes when . . . [clasps hands above head in victory]. That's how everybody has done on the spiritual path except those rare geniuses like Sri Ramakrishna or Sri Ramana Maharshi, who were born on the summit, and who almost entered the ring after winning the fight.

All the resources are right within everybody. This is what I want to assure you every day. Every one of us has these resources within ourselves. And if you are not able to hold your own against

a samskara, it is not because the samskara is invincible but because you are not prepared to draw upon your resources.

And here is again an Einstein story. During his Europe days, he had a doctor friend, woman doctor friend called Paulette. And one day, she met him on the street and said, “Where is your lab?” And Einstein took his own time, took his fountain pen out of his pocket and said, “That’s my lab.” If the samskara asks you, “Where are all your resources?” just say, “They are here.” [Points to himself.] “Where is your guarantee of final victory?” they ask. “Here.” And it is this confidence and this courage that the teacher usually gives by showing in his own life that he started like everybody, she started like everybody. And through continuous training, there came the day when, through the grace of the Lord, the fight ended and victory was won.

[Section Two]

The next verse, therefore: “Cross the river bravely. Conquer all your passions. Go beyond your likes and dislikes and all fetters will fall away.” Straight from the Gita. Now I want to share with you that I never had any suspicion that likes and dislikes were compulsions and I don’t think, in our modern civilization, they would easily agree that likes and dislikes are compulsions.

It was after I began again to recall my grandmother’s life – in some ways, in very small things, almost trivial matters. In most Hindu homes in those days, dogs were not very welcome. And I was the first patron of dogs in my ancestral family.

And I had my first dog when I was in my high school, I think. A couple of pups, which kept whining throughout the night. And my mother, naturally, had to get up and feed them. That’s what mothers are for. And many of my relatives used to make very unfavorable comments about this hullabaloo at night. You know, those little pups can make a lot of noise at night. They were hungry and thirsty. And they said to my grandmother, “Why don’t you give them away? You don’t like dogs.” “Oh,” she said, “these are my boy’s pups.” Immediate change, you know.

And in love, this is what . . . in real love this is what happens. If somebody whom you love – I’m not saying does anything that is undesirable – does something that you do not like but that’s quite healthy, that’s quite harmless, if you really love that person, you’ll be able to change your attitude immediately. Not only with my grandmother. I have seen with very ordinary people. When you love somebody who says, “Oh, I don’t particularly enjoy that.” And if you really love, it’s not just trying to be courteous. You are able to change your attitude. And when you are able to do this with sixty people, everything comes under you mastery. You can change your likes, you can change your dislikes at will.

And I don’t think I am exaggerating too much when I say, if people would only change their likes and dislikes in matters of food, in matters of clothes, in many other small matters, they will save a lot of energy and guard their mind against a great deal of agitation.

And the Buddha therefore is saying, in everything you do try to go against your likes and dislikes when they are harmful, when they are at other's expense, and you will gradually free your hands to embrace everybody, to support everybody. One of the interesting developments in freeing oneself from likes and dislikes is you become less subject to allergy. That's a very interesting comment on how with people who are subject to strong likes and dislikes, there is a possibility later on that they may become victims of many kinds of allergies even.

Here is another episode, or anecdote, to show how utterly detached from material possessions Einstein was. In fact, I was taken aback at some of the language he uses to warn people against success. It could have come straight from the Gita where he says, "Do not get involved in the fruits of your actions." And in his personal habits, as you all know, he was an extremely simple person. And in his dining room there was always a little table set for him with milk, bread, cheese, and fruit. And he used to go and sit down there and say, "What more can a man want than these things, plus a bed, a table, a chair, and a violin?" That's all, he says, that's all that a human being needs in life.

And to have one more quotation from him which could go straight into the Buddha again, this is not a quotation, this is by another great scientist about him. "Einstein spent his life searching for what is changeless in an incessantly changing society." Straight from the Dhammapada. "Einstein spent his whole life looking for the changeless in an incessantly changing society and he searched for unity in multiplicity all his life."

"Who is a true *brahmin*? Him I call a brahmin who has neither likes nor dislikes, who is free from the chains of fear." When you isolate yourself, you're filling your mind with fear. When you brood more and more upon yourself, you're living in a world of fear, and people who are very isolated, they usually feel great fears. And people who feel at home with everybody, who are prepared to love everybody, who are prepared to save everybody, they don't feel any sense of fear even though all of us are expected to take reasonable precautions. So it doesn't mean that we go and thrust ourselves into situations which are dangerous, but we don't have a sense of fear at all. And in the Upanishads, the sage will say, "Where there is no other, how can there be fear? Where there is no other, how can there be anger?" The answer is then all is love. You feel love towards everybody.

And it doesn't content itself with words; it expresses itself in deeds. And one of the names of Ramagiri could easily be Premagiri, the Hills of Love. Our whole work is oriented towards showing our love for people in this country, people all over the world, for the beasts of the field, for the birds of the air, in every possible way we can.

"The sun shines in the day. In the night the moon shines. The warrior shines in the battle. [He's talking about the battle against oneself.] In meditation, the brahmin." And when your mind is one-pointed, when all your attention is entirely on the Dhammapada or the Bhagavad Gita,

there is such joy in your heart, such security in your mind, that it'll shine on your face even after you leave Shanti. Here again, everybody can be radiant, everybody can be beautiful.

And to quote another favorite word of Einstein, which touches me very much. When he heard a fine scientific theory, he would not say, "How correct," or "How precise." He would say, "How beautiful!" And when he heard a theory that did not seem very valid, he would not say, "That is untenable." He would say, "How ugly." And to me a selfless person is beautiful.

And you'll find here the selfish person is ugly. And none of us want to be ugly and none of us need be ugly. Therefore, be kind to everybody and you'll find everybody will say to themselves, "He's a handsome man. She's a beautiful woman." In my olden days on the campus when some of these freshmen will say, "We don't quite understand the distinction between handsome and beautiful," I would say, "You are handsome, your sister is beautiful." And they'll say, "We agree."

PREPARING FOR LIFE'S FINALS

October 7, 1978

The main purpose of our interpreting the Dhammapada is to throw light on our daily life: why we think in a particular way, feel in a particular way, and how this way of thinking and way of feeling can be changed from negative to positive, from unloving to loving. So it may be of immediate help to all of us if we try to recapitulate the Eightfold Path with its application to our present *sadhana*. It is very characteristic of the scientific approach of the Buddha that he should put right understanding first. As long as we see wrongly we will live wrongly. As long as we think wrongly we will act wrongly. And a good part of the misunderstanding due to which we think wrongly, live wrongly, can be set right if we try to understand the nature of life – where fulfillment lies and where frustration lies.

In an interesting film that we saw yesterday in the company of our younger generation while being entertained and participating in the enjoyment of the younger generation, I couldn't help observing how much light the film throws on physically oriented people. From the beginning to the end it is a kind of religion in which people pray – at breakfast, at lunch, at dinner, at the midnight snack – for fulfillment. It is not a film that I would readily recommend to anyone who is not quite free from the tyranny of the palate. It can upset a lot of people if they are sensitive.

And the central character is played by a very good British actor, Robert Morley, who I understand is in San Francisco at present. It was he who, when we were celebrating the Centennial, was responsible for the great announcement "Come home, America; all is forgiven." That was Robert Morley at his best. He is an immense figure. Many of us remember him as Mr. Undershaft in Shaw's *Major Barbara*. He was big enough and fat enough. He has become bigger, fatter and he looks like two or three men amalgamated together.

To me it was a very startling reminder that this is what happens to physically oriented people who think that eating to satisfy the palate, to stimulate the taste buds, is the highest purpose of life. And the highlight of the film for me was when the doctor, who was played by a very good actor whom many of us enjoyed as the judge in the Ian Carmichael movies (he is the doctor now), he examines the patient Vandermeer. He relates a long catalogue of his physical ailments. Every vital organ was touched upon. And with the voice of a sincere friend, the doctor said, "You change your eating habits completely. Otherwise your number is going to be up in six months." And the reply was, "If I cannot eat all these things, I don't have any reason why I should live."

And it is the story of that article that I read, a very perceptive article couched in a very satirical vein by our friend Jacobson: "How to Kill Your Husband Slowly." And here there is a British secretary who is passionately fond of her boss, played by Robert Morley. And she realizes,

because of her loving concern, that the four famous cooks in Europe whom Vandermeer can never resist are really murdering him. It's a grim comedy in which we see not an instantaneous murder, but a slow gradual murder of a good man, of a sensitive man, through his loss of control over the palate.

And in the very entertaining British manner the secretary goes about killing all the four chefs, except the last one, who escapes because her lover is able to arrive at the last moment before the dessert explodes in a bomb. Actually the dessert was called Bomb Richelieu, made for the Queen.

So it was really an eye-opener for me because it's not only food that can kill people slowly. Self-will can kill people slowly but surely. And it is not in a figurative manner that I am using it – in a very physical manner, in a very medical manner, in a very practical manner. Those who have inflated egos, whose self-will is easily roused, they cannot escape some of the ravages of the vital organs which are bound to take place because of this excessive self-will.

So we can easily make another movie – Part II – in the same manner as this particular one to show how self-will brings about the death of human beings as surely as poison or bullets do, only over a longer period of time. I am trying to use very much the language of the Buddha because it's good to understand this. Indulging in self-will can be very pleasant for the time being. Having self-will violated can be very painful for the time being. But in the long run such people are going to lose their health, their security, and their capacity to have loving relations with those around them.

That's the first thing I would illustrate as being of paramount importance in the right understanding of life. The question can be asked, why isn't it easy? For the simple reason that the elimination of self-will or even the reduction of self-will requires a good deal of toughness. It requires a good deal of resolution, which is why the Buddha calls it swimming against the river of life.

Next, on this same right understanding of life. For a while it does appear painful not to be able to have one's way. It does appear difficult to yield to others when necessary, to work with people we don't like, to walk with people who don't like us. But, over a long period, this is what reduces self-will. This is what rubs off the angles and corners of personality. This is what enables us to relate to everybody. Even if we become established in spiritual awareness, there will be people to look askance at us, to differ from us, to criticize us, perhaps even to hinder us.

And I remember one of the simple statements of Mahatma Gandhi which I think inspired me a great deal, that I should be at peace not only among my friends, but also among my enemies. Until then I had taken it for granted that the very best thing one could do was to avoid people whom one disliked. The finest way of behavior was to keep away from people who disliked us. And it was this statement of Mahatma Gandhi which I think prompted me to try to practice it

in many of the personal relations that I had both at home and at work, in the family and in the community.

Here, we can open out our awareness to the needs of those around us. And to the extent we open out our awareness to the needs of those around us, to that extent we don't get agitated. It is people who are always carrying a mirror to reflect their self-will, who have a kind of self-will calculator always in their pocket. These are the people who get upset, who get agitated. And if you are going about turning your attention outwards to the needs of those in the kitchen, or those in the office or those in the print shop or those in the garden, you'll find there is not much attention to give your self-will. And self-will, when it doesn't receive attention, it loses weight. When it doesn't get its meal of attention it begins to wither away.

[Section Two]

The next step on the Eightfold Path is right purpose. Just as I quoted from this film, to millions of people food has become the substitute of a great purpose. Money has become the substitute of a great purpose. And perhaps to the vast majority pleasure has become the substitute of a great purpose. The Buddha is not talking as a moralist. He is talking as a scientist. And he is saying that if you want to grow to your full height, if you want to be completely secure, completely loving, to become a beneficial influence in the stream of life, then you have to have an overall purpose, in achieving which all your faculties become deeply integrated. This is called *moksha* in Hinduism, which really means "freedom." It's called *nirvana* in Buddhism, which really means the extinction of selfishness, the elimination of self-will.

And every day, what I would suggest is remind yourself in the morning before meditation to keep your eyes throughout the day on this great purpose, which is to become aware of the indivisible unity of life. It's not enough if we use it as an intellectual slogan or even as an ecological slogan. It has to be realized in the depths of our consciousness that people from all countries, all religions, all walks of life, they are one.

And many of the inspirational passages that we use in the practice of meditation are meant for this purpose. In truth the image of the Divine Mother is to remind all of us that just as Roberta has given birth to two children, the Divine Mother has given birth to all the children on this planet – men, women, children, animals, birds, every form of life. And that's what we worship in the image of the Divine Mother. I think it is Mahatma Gandhi again who shocked me into understanding the rigorous application of this truth, that if you are really sensitive to the needs of all – in Africa, in Asia, in South America – then you will not be able to live selfishly, enjoying the luxuries within your reach, spending your time on your own pleasure, or on your own profit.

And Gandhi goes to the extent of saying, the more sensitive you become, the more spiritually you grow, the more vigilant you will become. How to spend your time, your energy, your

resources. And there are many, many ways in which all of us can translate this sensitiveness to all life by living as simply as we can, by husbanding all of our resources carefully, by devoting a part of our time, our energy, our resources, to causes like ours which help not only California, not only the United States, but in course of time which may be of small help to people in all parts of the world.

Third is right . . . I'll put it as right conduct. It may not be the regular order but for me it is of utmost importance to apply the insight and resources released in meditation in our daily relationships. In other words when I go about every day with my experienced eyes over a long period of years, it's not very difficult for me to observe who is practicing the insight released in meditation, the resources released in meditation, to improve their daily relationships, and to contribute as much as they can to our work. So whether we work in the print shop or the kitchen or the office or the garden, either in the ashram or in our homes outside or at our place of work, it is possible to cultivate right conduct.

One is to give the very best we can. Instead of saying what is the least I can get away with, I would reverse the question, what is the most that I can get away with. This is the question that everyone can ask himself or herself, what is the most that I can get away with. And we shall find at our place of work there is a little more that we can contribute. Every day there is a little more that we can contribute. Not only in quality, even at times in quantity.

As the Buddha might say, if everybody does more, everybody's burden is lessened. When everybody does less, everybody's burden is increased. We have a saying in my mother tongue, which was at the tip of my teacher's fingertips every day, when she would point out to us, the lazy worker has to carry the mountain. And at college, at the university, at school, it was so obvious that it was the person who postponed, who wanted to have a good time, who used to have a terrible time during the last term, who couldn't get enough sleep, who couldn't go out to a casual movie, who couldn't enjoy himself at all.

And – if I may recall one of my escapades in those days – this was when I was in the graduate school, when I had understood this. On the eve of the finals which is about the month of March or April when it is very hot in India and all that you want is to jump in the river and swim and not study, particularly burning the midnight oil, I was in the dorm. All the lights would be burning in all the rooms. It was like a condominium. Every head doing the same thing, poring over the books with the same furrowed brow. And often one hand [shows head resting on hand]. It was almost the same scene except in a few rooms where they had been regular, they had been steady, they had always disposed of the work every day.

And I had some friends who were really feeling the load very much. Some were thinking of dropping out. Some were thinking of enlisting in the army. Desperate situations call for desperate measures. And I remember how I helped a few intimate friends of mine by bringing my bed out at nine o'clock at night. I had my little bamboo cot; I was carrying it, spread it out

in the open, put my bed down and threw myself on it beneath the envious, desperate eyes of my friends. It was done not with the object of hurting them, but with the object of reminding them that this is the way to enjoy student days. And I stretched my arms with great abandon and hummed a few tunes and turned over and went to sleep, and slept till the morning. Then again when I got up the lights were burning, heads were poring over the books and this was again [places hand on forehead], the gesture was there.

This is what I would call not only important for finals but for every day. The real finals will come to all of us at last you know. And it's good to remember: everybody has to take these finals. So now is the time to prepare, to dispose of all our daily work, not to accumulate any unfavorable karma. Do what is best for the day. Don't leave kindness for tomorrow, selflessness for day after tomorrow, compassion for next week. Attend to it right away. Move closer to people with whom you have been at loggerheads. Help people towards whom you don't feel very kindly. That's one of the easiest ways of getting over ill feeling.

If you feel highly ill-disposed towards, say, Mr. Pickwick, be good to Mr. Pickwick. Be friendly to his valet Sam Weller. And you'll find when you are being good to people towards whom you are ill-disposed, when you are being kind to those whom you do not like, a transformation begins.

And it's hard work, particularly when you have to keep on sustaining it. This is how we prepare for the finals. You have often term papers. You have midterms. In our Indian universities we have three, interestingly enough, terminal examinations. People from the medical world in the West will get frightened you know. If you ask Brian, "Where are you going?" He will say, "I am going to my terminal. I'm going to take my last test." It's almost like saying, making my last testament. People will say, "Have you finished your last test? Has he taken his terminal?" Whenever you have a severe test of ill will, people bursting in anger against you, using vituperative words, look upon it as a midterm. You can try to score A plus. Just as when you go to college you don't want to be at the bottom of the list.

There are many jokes in India on this particular subject. They'll bring a list of people who have done badly on the examination and after reading the list they will say, there are some names who are below the list. Their names are not usually read. It's very much like that. Let us prepare for the finals. Yama can be looked upon as the deity who conducts the finals. You can't ask for incomplete. He'll say, "It is either pass or fail. There are no incompletes." You can't plead absenteeism. You have to take the test.

And in the language of Buddhism, what you are in your next life is dependent entirely upon your performance. The grades are not given to you by somebody else. You give your own grades. It's a very sobering thought that you give your own grades, and you decide your own fate. So every day imagine yourself with a red pencil. When you have been very kind, you give

an “A,” when you have been very unkind you give a “D” or an “F.” And it is the accumulation of all these grades every day that determine the results in the finals according to the law of karma.

VERSES

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

yada dvayesu dhammesu paragu hoti brahmano
ath' assa sabbe samyoga attham gacchanti janato

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

Dhammapada Chapter Twenty-six, verse two

yassa param aparam va paraparam na vijjati
vitaddaram visannuttam tam aham brumi brahmanam

Who is a true brahmin? Him I call a brahmin who has neither likes nor dislikes, who is free from the chains of fear.

Dhammapada Chapter Twenty-six, verse three

diva tapati adicco rattim abhati candima
sannaddho khattiyo tapati jhayi tapati brahmano
atha sabbam ahorattim buddho tapati tejasa

The sun shines in the day; the moon shines in the night. The warrior shines in the battle, the brahmin in meditation. But day and night the Buddha shines in radiance of love for all.

Dhammapada Chapter Twenty-six, verse five

TERMS & REFERENCES

ashram A spiritual community.

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, but one who has attained stillness of mind.

Caliban A character from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

Divine Mother The feminine aspect of God, worshiped in many parts of India.

Iago A character from Shakespeare's *Othello*.

Mr. Pickwick Character from Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers*.

Premagiri Prema refers to pure love. Here Easwaran is saying that another name for the spiritual community he founded, Ramagiri or "Hills of Joy," could be Premagiri or "Hills of Love."

Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) A well-known Indian mystic.

sadhak A spiritual aspirant.

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

Sam Weller A character from Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers*.

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

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

Shanti Peace; name of the meditation hall at Ramagiri ashram.

Yama The Hindu god of death.

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