

THE TALKS OF EKNATH EASWARAN

32

Ease and Dis-ease
Charles the Cat

STUDY GUIDE

Table of Contents

WEEKLY LESSONS

Lesson One: 3
Lesson Two: 7
Lesson Three: 11
Lesson Four: 16

TRANSCRIPTS

Ease and Dis-ease: 19
Charles the Cat: 24

Verses: 31

Terms and References: 31

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.

Note to BMCM Fellowship Group coordinators: In the first and last lessons of this curriculum, the reflection exercise includes the choice of a meditation passage from *God Makes the Rivers to Flow*. You may want to let members of your Fellowship Group know to bring their copy of that book to those meetings.

If you are not currently a member of a Fellowship Group and would like information on joining one in your area, please visit www.nilgiri.org/fellowship

LESSON ONE

With this month's curriculum, the eighth in our series, we begin the second of the two major parts of our course. During the first seven months we honed our Eight Point Program skills, concentrating on the daily challenges of training the mind. For the remaining five months we will turn our attention to the overarching quest of the spiritual life: the transformation of personality – learning the art of changing ourselves, from the inside out.

The final paragraph of the chapter we will be studying serves as an ideal introduction to our lessons:

Of all that is wonderful in the human being, our most glorious asset is this capacity to change ourselves. Nothing is more significant. I admire the achievements of science, but I do not feel intimidated by the current conviction that we are what our genes are. My body is what my genes make it, but my character and behavior are not fixed by my genetic code. As proof we have the lives of great men and women of all religions who have thrown these claims to the winds with their personal transformations – from angry to compassionate, from insecure to unshakable, from human to divine. The message of their lives echoes down the corridors of time to those who have ears to hear: “You are not what your body is. Your real nature is spirit, which nothing can diminish or deny.” Whatever our past, whatever our present, all of us have the capacity to change ourselves completely through the practice of meditation.

Reading

“Like a ball batted back and forth,” says an ancient text called the Yogabindu Upanishad, “a human being is batted by two forces within”: one, the upward drive to evolve into spiritual beings; the other, the fierce downward thrust of our past conditioning as separate, self-oriented, physical creatures.

The literal meaning of the Sanskrit here is “like a ball hit by a stick held in the hand.” I don't have any idea what game the sages of ancient India had been watching, but I think tennis fits the verse perfectly. Millions of people have taken to this sport in the past few years, so it seems a natural one to use to bring this image to life.

Imagine a match between two gentlemen players who are probably among the best the game has seen: Bjorn Borg on the one side and Ivan Lendl on the other. Bjorn

caught my imagination when he came out of nowhere to win the French Open at the age of eighteen, and he has been a favorite of mine ever since. I like his manner on the court, and he has a precious quality that would serve him well if he took to meditation: like Gandhi, he is at his best when things are going against him. And Ivan Lendl, who comes from Czechoslovakia, is a serious young man with some of the most powerful strokes I have seen. One athlete reportedly asked a friend of Ivan's, "I've got to play against him; what do you suggest?" The friend replied, "A bulletproof vest."

Imagine being a tennis ball played by these two strong champions – Lendl, whose shots must travel at more than a hundred miles per hour, and Borg, who strings his racquets so taut that at night he is sometimes awakened by the *ping!* as the strings snap spontaneously under the strain. Every one of us, this ancient text says, is being played like this twenty-four hours a day back and forth between two opposing inner forces. Here are Ivan on one side of the court and Bjorn on the other, enjoying themselves immensely, yelling to each other, "Hit him for all you're worth; I'll slam the poor fellow back!"

This inner tension is our evolutionary heritage. It reflects our divided nature as human beings: partly physical, essentially spiritual, constantly pulled in two conflicting directions. If this sounds bad, it is actually quite positive. For if one of these players will not let us alone, neither will the other. Built into our very nature is an inner drive that will not let us be satisfied with living at our lowest level, governed only by biological laws. Some inner evolutionary imperative is constantly exhorting us to grow, to reach for the highest that we can conceive, as if nature itself will not let us rest with anything less than spiritual fulfillment.

Sometimes when I am waiting at the dentist's office, I like to look at the popular magazines. It doesn't matter if they are a few months old; I am always interested in their slick advertisements. Either by innuendo or by outright declaration, they are all aimed at one deep, almost universal desire: to change who we are, make ourselves somehow better – richer, smarter, more attractive, more secure, more at home with who we are.

Unfortunately, these implicit promises of Madison Avenue deal only with externals: a fragrance that the opposite sex will find irresistible, a ring that will make a relationship "last for eternity," a house so spectacular that we will want nothing more but to lounge in it all day and admire the appointments and the view. Despite their sophisticated appearance, below every advertisement like this I would like to write, "This won't change you! You'll still be the same old person. You'll still have to live with yourself as you are."

Toward the end of the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita there is a statement so direct, so penetrating, that it should move us to question all external attempts at self-improvement: those who are always trying to satisfy their personal desires will never find peace in this life. Such people are doomed to live in turmoil and isolation. They may live in palatial homes, hop from one resort to another, or have their photograph on the covers of the weekly magazines, but they won't have peace in their hearts. Why? Because if we cannot make changes where we really want to – in our own personality – it does not matter what else we may have achieved; we won't be able to live with ourselves. We can fool all of the people some of the time and some of the people all of the time, but there is one person – ourself – who will look at us with a cold eye and say, "You ain't foolin' me! You're not changing yourself at all; you're not growing."

Often, I think, this is why active people are so active, why adventurers adventure and globetrotters trot: we do not want to stop and listen to that quiet heckler in the depths of our hearts, reminding us of our real job. This is ultimately what insecurity means; that is where a sense of inadequacy really comes from.

During the past twenty-five years, I must have heard the same refrain from hundreds of people, particularly those who are young: "I just don't like myself." The unspoken assumption is, "This is the kind of person I am, and it's what I always will be. If I have crippling fears, the best I can do is learn to live with them. If I am prone to fits of anger, people will just have to accept me as I am."

But we *can* change. No one need ever feel resigned and say, "There is nothing I can do." There is everything we can do. That is the purpose and the power of that persistent upward force within us: if we turn inward we can remake ourselves completely, modeling ourselves in the image of the loftiest spiritual ideal we can conceive.

The other day Christine was showing me some old photographs taken when the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation was in its infancy. Two or three of those young faces we had not seen for years. Others, no longer young, were as close as the path outside our window, where a group of volunteers was working diligently at patching old asphalt. To a detached eye, the contrast was most amusing. "Look at this picture," I said, "and then look out there. Where did all that hair go?" But those were only physical changes. Much more important – and deeply gratifying – were the changes I knew these friends had wrought in their thinking processes over years of meditation. Many of them had learned to transform anger into sympathy, impatience into patience, resentment into love: not perfectly, not always, but they knew how to do it, and they knew it could be done. What could be more exhilarating?

These are changes any one of us can learn to make. If you can be secure where you were insecure, selfless where you were selfish, if you can respect people around you even if they don't like you and you don't like them, then I will say with joy, "Yes. You really *have* changed." As Meister Eckhart would say, the pauper that you were is dead; the prince is born.

This rebirth is the purpose of meditation. It is a tremendous adventure, the greatest that can beckon to a human being. It tests every quality we possess, brings into play every faculty we have. It is for embarking on this supreme adventure that we have come into the world, and until we accept the challenge, we can never really rest content with anything less.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Note that while Sri Easwaran talks of two forces, his emphasis is clearly on the upward force. He uses an interesting turn of phrase when describing our true nature as human beings: "apparently physical, essentially spiritual." The practical implication is that, as spiritual beings, we have all we need for self-transformation right within us. We needn't try to manipulate our circumstances or import an ideal from outside. Rather, we need to ally ourselves with the upward force within us, and let it do the work.

Ask yourself: If I really could make changes – permanent beneficial changes – in my personality, what would I change, and how? Find an inspirational passage from *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* that speaks of the state of mind you would like to have as your permanent experience of life. Read it through several times. In order to identify the upward force in your life, ask yourself:

- * In what part of my life is the longing for change most active?
- * Where is my inability to change most distressing to me?
- * What makes the longing for change more intense?
- * What do I do that dampens that longing and makes me forget my aspiration?

Try to memorize your chosen passage this month. We'll refer to it again.

Reading for Inspiration

When it's time for inspiration, please read the rest of Chapter Eight in *Conquest of Mind*.

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON TWO

We are continuing our exploration of the art of self-transformation as we read Chapter Eight of *Conquest of Mind*. Last week we reflected upon the fundamental changes we'd like to see in our personality, and we chose a meditation passage to represent them. This week we will do some more work on the essential skill of discriminating between what Sri Easwaran calls the upward and downward forces in our lives.

Reading

One of the greatest figures of medieval India, Ramanuja, throws light on this challenge in words that should be on the walls of every school campus, every statesman's office, every home: "What we seek as our highest goal depends upon what we believe ourselves to be."

If you reflect on this brief statement, you can get lost in its manifold ramifications. Virtually all of us believe we are physical creatures, subject to biological laws. And when you believe you are a physical creature, Ramanuja says, the highest goal you can aim at has to have physical limits. You will spend your life seeking physical satisfactions. A full diagnosis of human suffering is given in just this one line.

Like everybody else, I grew up believing that I was purely physical, a collection of biochemical constituents. My friends subscribed to this belief; my learned colleagues shared it vehemently. The world we live in is based on this view; everyone takes it for granted. Even if we believe intellectually that the human being has a spiritual side, very, very few of us can conceive of ourselves without the physical, biochemical apparatus of our body and personality.

What has changed for me since then? Everything. Not two or three things but everything. Through meditation, with the help of the demanding disciplines I followed every day in the midst of a busy life, that belief in myself as a purely physical creature has fallen away completely. Today I do not look upon myself or anyone else as physical. I identify with the Self, pure spirit, the same in all.

In this realization, the body becomes no more than a kind of jacket that you wear: you take care of it as very useful, but you never once think that it and you are the same.

Imagine if you thought you were your jacket. Taking it to the cleaners would be frightful; torn pockets would be a major trauma. It sounds silly, but that is just how most of us relate to our bodies too. To a surprising extent, we live to please our

body instead of having it help and serve us. We identify with it so closely that we allow it to make decisions for us and dictate how we feel about ourselves. When our body experiences a craving, we say it's a "biological necessity." If our appearance is less than perfect, we think there is something wrong with *us*.

It is from this obsessive identification with the body, I believe, that many physical and emotional problems arise. In meditation, as we learn at deeper and deeper levels that the basis of our personality is not physical but spiritual, such problems fall away. Often we do not even have to confront them. We simply go deeper, move away from the tenements of consciousness where they arise. You can leave psychosomatic problems hanging in the closet and find another home in a much safer neighborhood; they will never be the wiser. This approach is very different from the conventional wisdom of the modern world. It cannot work without meditation. For it is much more than a change in life-style; it is a transformation of thought-style.

As we absorb this higher image of who we are, many important consequences follow. When you know that you are essentially spiritual, you no longer relate to yourself as a creature to be satisfied with physical pleasures. You do not relate to others in terms of their physical appearance. You know that your worth derives from the eternal Self within you – and because this same Self lives in the hearts of all, you find it easy to relate to everyone with respect and love.

This change in personal relationships is one of the most joyful benefits of spiritual experience, yet it brings enormous responsibilities. When we see ourselves in all, detachment from our own ego is essential. Otherwise we will get emotionally entangled in other people's problems, which is just the opposite of love.

Much of my day, for example, is spent in guiding others in meditation, both by letter and in person. Often these friends bring with them burdensome personal problems. If I identified myself with my body and mind instead of with the Self, I would not be able to bear such burdens cheerfully day after day without ever feeling burned out. I would come to the dinner table and spend half an hour staring down at my plate, thinking, "What can I do to help this person out?" When we believe we are the mind, no matter what we are doing, part of the mind cannot help chewing the same problems over and over. During meditation our concentration is scattered; during the day our vitality is drained, our security is low, and our capacity to relate to people is cramped and constrained. Everything is affected.

Today, just because of this change of belief, I do not have any demands on my vitality that I cannot meet. I can face hard blows with equanimity, help others to solve the most prickly of problems with compassion and not get involved in the turmoil.

And when an emergency comes up, I can write a huge check against my vitality account and know that it will not bounce. There is no magic about this; anyone can learn to do it. Such benefits give plenty of motivation to work hard at changing our image of who we are – from a separate, physical creature into a whole, loving, spiritual being.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Last week we examined the action of the upward force as it manifests itself in the longing we feel for change and the distress we feel when we are unable to be who we want to be. This week we'll observe where the downward force is active in our life, and reflect on how we can extricate ourselves from it.

In this chapter we got a clue to distinguishing the upward force from the downward. Downward is “physical,” upward is “spiritual.” This is a point that bears some elaboration. Remember that Easwaran never spoke deprecatingly about the body. He always encouraged us to give our body good care: exercise, rest, food, and relaxation. But all too often, we look to physical satisfactions for more than they can give us. The physical view of life (which is closely connected with the downward force) lures us to consume and possess more and more in a quest for lasting security and happiness. In fact, says Easwaran, lasting fulfillment can come only from spiritual growth.

Take a few minutes to reflect on the ways in which your attention and desires are drawn “downward.” In what ways do you rely on possessions and physical satisfactions for security or fulfillment that they cannot give? Now think for a moment of the passage you chose last week, which represents your ideal of self-transformation. Imagine how fulfilling it would be to see that ideal appearing in your life. In what way might you start to pursue *that* fulfillment instead of the “will o’ the wisp” satisfactions of the physical?

Watching the Talk

When it's time for inspiration, please read the introduction below before watching the first talk on the disc, “Ease and Dis-ease.”

In this talk, Easwaran is elaborating on the theme of this month's curriculum: All of us can change ourselves completely through the practice of meditation. In fact, change is the very fabric of life. For those who accept the challenges of life's changes as an opportunity to remake themselves for the better, life brings the joy of self-mastery, a sense of ease and well-being even amidst the most difficult transitions. For those who try to resist change and cling to outward

physical satisfactions, life often brings suffering – a feeling of being overwhelmed and unable to cope that Easwaran here calls “dis-ease.”

Given on the Buddha’s birthday in 1979, this talk includes several terms that have become familiar in this course:

- * *duhkha*, meaning sorrow or ill health;
- * *sukha*, meaning joy or health; and
- * *samskara*, which means a latent or unconscious tendency toward a particular kind of thinking, usually negative.

Towards the end of the talk, Easwaran gives a definition that sums up the approach of this week’s lesson: “The Buddha, therefore, says, if you want life to be joyful, if you really want to be merry, if you want to win the love and respect of all, he says, put an end to your self-will. Bring your selfishness to an end and live for the welfare of all.”

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON THREE

Last week we learned to distinguish between two forces – upward and downward – that Sri Easwaran describes in Chapter Eight of *Conquest of Mind*. This time we learn a technique for allying ourselves with the upward force, so that it can help carry us upstream, through our conditioning, to the goal of life.

Reading

Only when I got beneath the surface of consciousness in meditation, many years ago, did I begin to see the play of forces between these two ideals, constantly pulling us toward different goals. Then I began to long more than anything else to win my freedom and escape being banged about on the court of life.

The cry of freedom has always appealed to me deeply. Even in my youngest days, Granny could always get me to change direction with just one question: “Don’t you want to be free?” So today, if someone is allergic to phrases like “spiritual living,” I say, “All right. Let’s talk about living in freedom.” Until we stop letting ourselves get knocked about by our biological conditioning, we don’t have any idea what freedom really means.

Remember the Buddha’s words: “All that we are is the result of what we have thought.” If our thinking is based on stimulus and response, he is trying to tell us, then most of us live like puppets, moved by patterns of thinking built up over years of repetition. These habits of mind cause us to say and do certain things habitually. They motivate our actions and mouth our words, and we just go along.

When we lose our temper, for example, it is as if anger were a puppet master, sticking two fingers up into our head and stimulating all the old control centers to make us move. “Start fussing and fuming *now!* You know how. Remember?” When we act on these angry impulses, we are adding to our habitual angry response. After a time, we have precious little choice in how we respond to the frustrations and irritations of everyday life. Someone gets in our way and we can’t help exploding. It is not as if we choose to get angry. Anger – what yoga psychology calls the anger *samskara* – is making our decisions for us.

The same mechanism is at work in all our rigid, conditioned emotional reactions – resentment, jealousy, lust, anxiety, greed, self-will, and their hundred and one relations. We would be amazed if we could look below the surface level of consciousness and see how many of our problems are caused by these deep-seated habits of

thinking. This is a distressing sight, but it serves a vital purpose: it fires the desire to rise once and for all above the tyranny of our mind.

How can we do this? Is it possible not to be batted back and forth between spiritual and physical demands?

Yes, the mystics answer with one voice, it *is* possible. We can learn to make every response a matter of free choice. If we can ally all our personal efforts with the upward drive of evolution, it will carry us beyond the reach of physical conditioning to a state where love, resourcefulness, and vitality are spontaneous and free.

“In the river of life,” says another ancient yoga text, “two currents flow in opposite directions. One, on the surface, flows toward sorrow, toward sickness, toward bondage. The other, beneath it, flows toward happiness, health, and freedom.” This may be fantastic hydrodynamics, but it illustrates our predicament perfectly. If we stay at the surface and do nothing, this image suggests, life will still take us somewhere – but not where we want to go. Staying in one place is not an option. To catch the deep current that leads to freedom, we have to swim and swim hard, against the flow of every conditioned response.

Again, the Buddha’s words give us the key: “All that we are is the result of what we have thought.” How does the mind become conditioned? By thinking the same thoughts over and over and over. To get free, then, we have only to think opposite thoughts over and over. That is why the Buddha called his way of life *patisotagami*: “swimming against the current” of selfish living, in order to merge at last in the flow of love that is our real nature.

This is not just for the thrill of mastery. The Buddha is not the kind of teacher to tell us to do something contrary simply because it is hard, or to do something painful simply because we learn from pain. Going against the current has a very down-to-earth purpose: the reconditioning of the nervous system, so that we can rise above the dictates of pleasure and pain.

In all of us, the nervous system is conditioned to strict one-way traffic: toward what we like and away from what we do not like. Any attempt to drive against this traffic brings a cry of protest from body and mind. This reaction is only natural; it is part of our biological inheritance. But pleasure and pain are part of life. Often we find it necessary to do something unpleasant or forgo something pleasant for the sake of a higher goal. At such times we need the full cooperation of our body and mind, a nervous system that can face life’s challenges without complaint. This is not merely spiritual living. It is the essence of a stress-proof personality, which everyone in the modern world needs.

“Yoga,” says the Bhagavad Gita, “is evenness of mind.” When you can keep your mind on an even keel in good fortune and bad, in pleasure and pain, when you can be kind to those who like you and to those who do not, then you have reached the state of yoga: you are free.

Between senses and sense objects, the Gita explains – for example, between the taste buds and a fresh pizza – there is an intimate affinity which has nothing to do with us. Our dog Ganesha has a similar affinity with buttered toast. The moment he senses a piece he has to have it, even if he has already eaten. And then he can’t just gobble it down. He has to go over to a particular spot, next to a particular yellow dandelion, and fold his paws around his toast in a particularly dainty way; only then can he eat. That is just what the senses do with sense objects, the Gita suggests, and there is no need for us to jump in. I enjoy watching Ganesha enjoy his toast, but I don’t get emotionally involved. If there is no toast for me, I don’t get depressed or feel deprived. His job is to eat; mine is to watch and enjoy.

Similarly, the Gita says, although sensory events have a compelling effect on the body and the mind, they really have nothing to do with us. We think we are involved because we identify ourselves with the body. Our real Self, pure spirit, is the detached observer, who watches life with quiet compassion, always free to enjoy.

In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord tells his disciple Arjuna: “When the senses encounter sense-objects, a person experiences cold or heat, pleasure or pain. These sensations are fleeting; they come and go. Bear them patiently, Arjuna.”

This is profound, practical philosophy, with a touch of humor in it too. “Arjuna,” Lord Krishna asks teasingly, “When you have your bath, do you cry if the water is warmer than you like? Do you get angry if it is a little too cold?” Temperature is just the contact of water with skin, sometimes pleasant, sometimes unpleasant. On a cold morning it is enjoyable to have a hot shower; after a hot day, it is refreshing to plunge into a cool river. Everybody finds these experiences pleasant. But we don’t spend a lot of time thinking about them. We don’t go around telling everyone in the office, “I had a hot shower this morning!” or go to bed depressed because the bathwater was too cold. It is the same with the mind. Just as we experience a momentary sensation of warmth or cold on the skin, we feel a momentary sensation of liking or disliking in the mind, as fleeting and insubstantial as a shadow.

Our usual response, however, is to cling to things we like as if they could last forever – and without realizing it, we cling to things we dislike too. When someone says something objectionable we comment to ourselves, “I don’t like that person.” And we keep on saying it, despite all the other things he or she may say or do; we

can't let go. "This is just a momentary touch of unpleasantness," Sri Krishna would say. "Why get excited over it? Don't give it any more attention than you would a tepid bath."

Of course, this is difficult to do. But even more difficult is to look on pleasure in the same way. Sri Krishna's advice here is thoroughly original. When he says, "Put up with pain," Arjuna nods; he is a warrior and can understand that. But when Krishna adds, "Put up with pleasure too," Arjuna rubs his ears. "That's right," Krishna says. "Bear it patiently. It comes and goes. Don't run after it, and don't try to cling to it when it comes your way." Pleasure is as fleeting as suffering. In fact, as the Buddha says, most of our suffering comes from trying to cling to pleasure, trying to build happiness on a sensation that comes and goes.

The artistry of this appeals to me deeply. Today, after more than twenty-five years of taking Sri Krishna's words to heart, if you see me in a pleasant situation and ask, "How are you doing?" I will say, "I'm bearing up." I am enjoying myself, but I am patiently keeping my mind unruffled too – in fact, it is only a calm mind that can really enjoy. Then, when something unpleasant comes – as it is sure to – I can say, "I'm bearing this well also." If it does not sound paradoxical, I enjoy life when fortune is against me just as I do when fortune shines.

When you apply this, you see Sri Krishna's mischievous sense of humor. After a date at a gourmet restaurant, if your boyfriend or girlfriend asks, "Did you enjoy yourself?" just say nonchalantly, "Oh, all that pleasure! I think I stood it rather well."

With this kind of detachment, pleasure leaves no residue of compulsion in the mind – no emotion-charged memory, no craving to look forward to the next time. Ordinarily, after a satisfying sensory experience, the mind immediately wants to know, "When can we do that again?" The memory sits in the mind like a time bomb, waiting for a suitable opportunity to explode into behavior again. There is very little freedom in this, which greatly curtails our capacity to enjoy. Even to enjoy a sensory experience, we have to be detached. Remember those lines of William Blake:

He who binds to himself a joy
Doth the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in Eternity's sunrise.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

This reading introduces us to a technique for allying ourselves with the upward force, letting it carry us upstream through the current of our conditioning. It is not always a pleasant process to swim against the current. The resistance we feel can be downright painful, like a torrent of water roaring at us with great force. If we try to do all the swimming by ourselves – through sheer will power – it's nearly impossible to keep swimming. But Easwaran's message here is that we have another force – a stronger force – working for us.

It's not easy to recognize that upward force. In Lesson One we observed that it sometimes takes the form of distress – a feeling of frustration that we cannot make the changes we'd like to make in our personality. Naturally, that frustration is uncomfortable. However, if we accept the initial discomfort, we will find that it actually works like a kind of outboard motor, pushing us upstream against the current.

In order to get this motor working for us, we need to recondition the nervous system so that the initial discomfort doesn't make us quit. This is far more than just will power – grinning and bearing it. It's training attention. We redirect our thoughts and desires into the channel of change – away from our own resistance, complaining, or desire to evade the challenge.

The key to success is the gradual approach. Divide the work up into manageable bits and keep your attention on the progress you are making, rather than on the difficulty or discomfort of the work. Choose an area where you feel distress or frustration at your own spiritual limitations. Now reflect on your progress and find no fewer than three ways in which you have improved during the past month or year (even if your success was simply to keep trying, or to have made a feeble effort when you wanted to quit). Write them down, and congratulate yourself. Now give some thought to how you will build on this success. How might you start to make such little successes habitual? Remember the clue Easwaran gives – repetition. In what ways could you begin repeating such successes? How might you keep your attention focused on these victories, rather than on the difficulty or discomfort?

Reading for Inspiration

When it's time for inspiration, please read from Chapter Eight of *Seeing with the Eyes of Love*, entitled "Love Feels No Burden."

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON FOUR

We started this month by identifying the direction we want to go spiritually – the permanent changes we want to make in our personality. Then we learned to distinguish between the two forces active within us, so that we might break our alliance with the downward force. Then we moved on to study the technique of allying ourselves with the upward force. Now, to conclude, we return to our spiritual ideal and ask ourselves how it elicits in us a passionate desire to grow and an increasing dissatisfaction with our limitations. We ask ourselves how we can nourish and harness those feelings, making them into an engine that will always carry us on to the goal.

Reading

Years ago, when my wife and I were looking at old houses, we came across a once-gracious garden with an ancient marble fountain so clogged with rubbish that not a drop of water could get through. You don't just give up such a fountain for lost. With a lot of cleaning, you can get the water to start playing again. Then grass and flowers will grow around it, and birds will come there to have their bath; it will grace the garden with its beauty.

It is the same with personality. To remake ourselves, we don't have to bring goodness, love, fearlessness, and the like, and stuff them all in somehow. They are already present in us, deep in our consciousness; that is why we can never really rest content with being anything less. If we work to remove the impediments that have built up over many years of biological conditioning, to dislodge all the old resentments and fears and selfish desires, love will flow from us like a fountain, and those we live and work with will come to us to be refreshed.

Here the spiritual figures of other times can give us confidence by their example. Ask Saint Augustine if his behavior as a young man gave any hint of the treasures of the spirit hidden inside. He would laugh. "Ask my parents," he would say. "Ask around my home town. They will tell you what a sigh of relief they breathed when I left for Carthage, burning with my desires. 'You weren't the same person then,' they say – and in a sense that is true. That young man was a pauper – insolvent, worth nothing much, a burden on most everybody. In his place today there stands a prince, bearing gifts for all."

And if we ask, "Is this a miracle, then?" Augustine would just smile. "Not at all. It is the result of a tremendous amount of loving labor. I had to teach my mind new ways of thinking. But the hardships are not overwhelming if you want more than anything else to bring your destiny into your own hands."

Of all that is wonderful in the human being, our most glorious asset is this capacity to change ourselves. Nothing is more significant. I admire the achievements of science, but I do not feel intimidated by the current conviction that we are what our genes are. My body is what my genes make it, but my character and behavior are not fixed by my genetic code. As proof we have the lives of great men and women of all religions who have thrown these claims to the winds with their personal transformations – from angry to compassionate, from insecure to unshakable, from human to divine. The message of their lives echoes down the corridors of time to those who have ears to hear: “You are not what your body is. Your real nature is spirit, which nothing can diminish or deny.” Whatever our past, whatever our present, all of us have the capacity to change ourselves completely through the practice of meditation.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

This week we’ll review the assignment with which we began the month:

Ask yourself: If I really could make changes – permanent beneficial changes – in my personality, what would I change, and how? Find an inspirational passage from *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* that speaks of the state of mind you would like to have as your permanent experience of life. Read it through several times. Ask yourself:

- * In what part of my life is the longing for change most active?
- * Where is my inability to change most distressing to me?
- * What makes the longing for change more intense?
- * What do I do that dampens that longing and makes me forget my aspiration?

In what three ways have you made progress toward your ideal this month? In what way have your efforts increased your longing for change? What changes might you make in the way you live your day that would help you build on your successes?

Watching the Talk

When it’s time for inspiration, please read the introduction below and watch the second talk on the disc, “Charles the Cat.”

In this talk, Sri Easwaran helps us see life’s many changes as reminders to start changing ourselves. The passing away of Charles, one of the cats that lived in the BMC community, provides the occasion for Easwaran to reflect on the meaning of death. If we are practicing the

Eight Points with dedication, the death of loved ones (and by extension all serious change) can be a goad to help us overcome the petty distractions or lack of will that hold us back on the spiritual path.

Easwaran presents the drama of life and death from the Hindu and Buddhist perspectives, through the theory of reincarnation. It is not necessary to subscribe to this belief to practice meditation or to get the most out of this talk. The point to grasp is that we can take our spiritual evolution into our own hands and gradually discover the changeless element in our personality – a living core that is untouched by any change, even death. When we base our lives on the search for the changeless, we gain the security and wisdom to transform our personality into an expression of universal love.

He quotes a verse from the Bhagavad Gita: “As the same person inhabits the body through childhood, youth, and old age, so too at the time of death he or she attains another body. The wise are not deluded by these changes.”

And he refers to another Gita verse: “As one abandons worn-out clothes and acquires new ones, so when the body is worn out a new one is acquired by the Self, who lives within.”

He also uses a few important Sanskrit terms. *Jiva* is the evolving individual soul, which takes on various forms through the course of its evolution. *Karma* is the cumulative force of life experience, which gradually teaches the *jiva* to leave selfishness behind and live in changeless love. And the *atman* is the eternal source of that love, the unchanging core of the *jiva*. To realize the *atman* is the goal of spiritual evolution, and of our practice of the Eight Point Program.

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

May 19, 1979

We are trying to celebrate the Buddha's birthday by absorbing some of his fundamental truths governing life, which he discovered through his own personal *sadhana*. This is the only way we can discover the truths of the scriptures – by experimenting with our own life through the practice of meditation and the allied disciplines, and transforming our character, conduct, and consciousness, just as the Buddha tells us we can do through persistent endeavor. In other words, according to the Buddha, if you are insecure, he'll say, why don't you change yourself? If you're selfish, why don't you change yourself? If you're unhappy, why don't you make yourself happy? If you're unloving, why don't you make yourself loving? This is the direct thrust of the Buddha that none of us can parry. We have a very clever skill for parrying the blow from most spiritual teachers but with the Buddha every time you will say, "Touché."

And last time we were dwelling upon his concept of *dukkha*, which is an all-comprehensive term, which is a kind of combination of physical ailments, emotional ailments, and spiritual ailments. That's why the word *dukkha* is very difficult to translate. And in the Gita, as you know, *sukha* and *dukkha* will always appear together. And I have perhaps come to the conclusion that the easiest rendering of *sukha* and *dukkha* is to say "ease and dis-ease." This is something that everybody can understand. *Sukha* is ease. *Dukkha* is dis-ease. And a spiritual person is one who is at ease – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And a selfish person, a self-willed person, is one who is the victim of dis-ease, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This is very much the approach of the great physician he was. And it may be remembered that in the *Samyukta Nikaya* of the Buddha, there are thirty-two terms for nirvana. From one of which the name *aroga* is taken. *Aroga*: free from disease, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Now, the Buddha is neither pessimistic, as most Western scholars maintain him to be, or optimistic, as many sentimental devotees maintain him to be. If you ask him whether he is an optimist or a pessimist he'll say, I'm a realist. That's the Buddha, you know, and he will say, we suffer because we don't see life as it is. We suffer because we don't see people as they are. And he will say, when you see life as it is, when you see people as they are, when you see animals and birds as they are, *yatha bhutam*, all sorrow will fall away, all suffering will come to an end. This is the great message of mysticism in all religions. When we see life as it is all sorrow falls away.

The Buddha, particularly today, does give us householders, laymen, as translators often say, which hurts. You know, having been an academic figure for a long, long time, to refer to myself as a layman . . . it hurts me, and I like to say "householder." Those who live with their families, those who live with their friends, those who live in the world, contributing to life around them, they are householders. To me, householder is not just a person who is attached only to his wife and child or to her husband and parrot. That's not being a householder. A householder here is attached to all. And I describe myself as a good householder because I'm equally attached to all

of you. And to Muka, to Hebbles, to Woosh, and to the few frogs now that share my threshold. And there is often a tendency to emphasize that the Buddha was essentially a monastic teacher, only for monks and nuns. And I want to add today that he has the same message for all of us.

The approach to the truth of *dukkha*, of disease, by the Buddha is from three aspects. You know, he was a great classifier, great teacher; he had always to say, one two three four five six. Or A B C. And just imagine him seated under the trees, talking to his beloved students that *dukkha*, or disease, can be approached from three angles. It is the same sorrow, it is the same suffering, it is the same disease, but it can be approached from three angles. One is *dukkha dukkha*. *Dukkha* that is *dukkha*, which I would for the sake of convenience say, physical or externals, caused by physical or external means. Sorrow brought about when you fall off your bicycle, when you escape by a hair's breadth from a Toyota. And then the Buddha says, there is *viparimana dukkha*, the sorrow, the disease, the suffering caused by change. You can see how precise it is. During the last ten years, for example, how many changes have taken place in our body? And he is now not talking about the suffering . . . the body doesn't suffer if a few hairs are lost. It is the mind. "My beauty is gone, my glamour is going." And the Buddha will say, change is the nature of life. Change is the very texture of life. And he is telling all his students, this is going to happen to everyone's body, even the littlest one. It's going to happen to one's body and there is even a terrible saying very much in the Buddhistic strain, "If you can look at even a baby's hand, you can see the wrinkles there."

This is all to remind us, you know, about the urgency of it all, about the need to lead the spiritual life. And that's why the Buddha ran to the Himalayas to save not only his little boy Rahula but to save all little boys and girls which means we. And in personal relationships, for example, you know after the initial satisfaction of novelty, after the initial satisfaction of physical newness, for everybody who bases relations on physical bonds, there is going to be lack of satisfaction, increasing lack of satisfaction, and slowly the beginning of dissatisfaction. You know, the old laws of economics – increasing returns and decreasing returns – are true of all relationships also in which you do not put the other person first, in which you do not put others first. If I may say so, I too learned it the hard way. Today my relationships are always growing richer and the joys of my relationships are always growing richer because I've learned through my teacher's guidance and blessing. And the complete love and loyalty I have for her to not to think about myself but to think always about those around me.

And everywhere, I would say, I am showing the positive side. Think about yourself, you're going to have dis-eased relationships. Think about those around you more, you'll have relationships of ease. You'll be at ease with everybody, even those who may not be very nice to you, even those who may not always be kind to you. You'll be at ease. And again that concept of being at ease is a very good one. And I would say a good test is how much at ease among people who dislike you are you? How much at ease can you be among people who maybe offend you, who sometimes criticize you? And it's a very good question.

And first, therefore, is disease caused by external agents. Carcinogenic agents in the atmosphere, I would say, *duhkha duhkha*. And maybe diseases caused by anger, resentment, hostility. This is caused by agents inside, in the mind. So to deal with health we have to deal with what is external and we have also to deal with what is internal.

And then third, *sankara duhkha*. You know, the *duhkha* of *samskaras*, conditioning. When I began to understand how many of my decisions were not taken by me, how many of my attitudes were not under my free sovereignty, I made up my mind – with great difficulty but under the inspiration of my teacher – that I wanted to live in freedom, not to be at the beck and call of my *samskaras*, not to be attached only to one or two people around me, but to have love for all, to be able to live in freedom wherever I went. And I want you to know that everybody can aspire for this by remembering these three aspects of *duhkha*: the physical, the mental, and the spiritual.

[Section Two]

I think last time I was also quoting a great simile from the Buddha where he compares our life to a mountain river, which is changing from second to second, from instant to instant. And there is a beautiful saying, *na cha so, na cha anyo*. Richard na cha so, Richard is not the same as he was in L.A.; na cha anyo, he is also not another. When Joshua comes back from Mexico, he will not be the same, nor will he be another. And the Buddha naturally would extend it to the next life or the previous life by saying Sumner was still the same. Yet Sumner is not another.

Well, the main addition to this message of the Buddha as seen through the eyes of the Gita is, yes, the Gita will say, everyone is a river, but the Gita will say, see that you join the sea of love who is Krishna. This is a positive aspect of Hinduism, the very beautiful aspect of the Krishna tradition. Every one of us may be a river, changing from moment to moment, changing from instant to instant, but we can all join this sea of love who is Krishna, who is beyond all change.

When you have erased all self-will, when you have gone beyond the concept of I, me, and mine, you are in nirvana. And with a very small voice, full of love and gratitude to my teacher, I can say I have been enabled through many years of very dedicated *sadhana* to detach myself from I, me, and mine.

And on the strength of my small experience I can tell you how much joy, how much love, how much service, and how much value my little life has today. So what I am trying to appeal to you is when you yourself are able to extinguish your self-will and to embrace all those around you in love, you will be able to join with me in saying that nirvana is positive, nirvana is not extinction, it is *tanha khayam nibbana*. It is extinction of the fierce thirst that I, my family, should be at ease if necessary at the expense of all those around me.

And see how beautiful some of the terms for nirvana are and I was very interested to read a well-known Buddhist author saying these are all metaphorical. If it had been my book I would have written in the margin, “Why don’t you learn to meditate?” These are all literal. These are all practical. When you have extinguished your self-will and put an end to your selfishness and learned to love all those around you, you’ll say, “Nibbana is Shiva.” It’s one of the terms that the Buddha uses. All is joy; all is good.

The other is *kema*, *kshema*. Nibbana is the welfare of all. When you hear that there is violence going on in Iran, you suffer. When you hear there is hunger in Asia, you suffer. And you want to do something to relieve that suffering. When you hear that elephants are being killed in Africa you’re able to do something. When you hear that seals are being killed near Canada, you suffer with the seals and you’re able to do something. That’s the sign of nibbana. *Shuddhi*: purity in thought, word, and deed. And *dipa*. I’m going to interpret it in two ways, which should again elevate scholarly blood pressure. *Dipa* is, the Buddha will say, make an island of yourself in the sea of *samsara*. I would also say, *dipa*, lamp, make a lamp of yourself. Wherever you go, let there be light. Wherever you go, throw light on the lives of others also by shedding light like a little lamp.

And you remember the great words of Sri Ramakrishna, the world is a merry mansion, we should be joyful always. Meher Baba used to say, cheerfulness is a mark of the spiritual aspirant. Not this [draws corners of his mouth down], cheerfulness, you see [smiles broadly]. Always loving, always compassionate, always cheerful, see, it does good for people to look at us. And the king of Kosala, I think, who had been to many spiritual groups, there were quite a number of poor teachers in ancient India, some of whom are mentioned in Buddhist chronicles. He used to say, they look so sullen, so morose, and the king of Kosala says, “Your students, your people, they have a light heart, they have a light foot.” And actually the phrase that is used is “they have a gazelle’s mind.” You just look at the deer leaping over our fences, that’s how the king of Kosala says, “Your students, when they see obstacles, they just leap over them, gracefully, they don’t go back. And they clear; they don’t knock off the hurdle either.”

See the artistry of the Buddha. Just as the deer – so beautifully and gracefully, no effort at all – clears the obstacles, the king of Kosala says, “so your disciples, so your people, clear the hurdles of life.” And I think this must have been music to the ears of the Buddha. Most good spiritual teachers who are established in themselves, who expect nothing more from life because they don’t need anything more from life, I don’t think if you tell them they are eloquent and their personalities are radiant and their hair shines like . . . what . . . “He walks in beauty like the night.” They’ll just say, “Yes, if it pleases you, go on misquoting Byron.” But if you tell them, “Look at all of you . . .” If you hear in your hospital, in your campus, in your little boat, in your little store, they say, “How cheerful you are, how loving you are, how good it is to be with you, how happy it makes you to be with us,” I really get excited.

And the Buddha, therefore, says, if you want life to be joyful, if you really want to be merry, if you want to win the love and respect of all, he says, put an end to your self-will. Bring your selfishness to an end and live for the welfare of all. And I think the king of Kosala tells the Buddha that his disciples lived with a gazelle's mind because they had realized the great and full significance of the Blessed One's teaching.

CHARLES THE CAT

April 28, 1979

The main topic for me today is the question of death. It is Swami Vivekananda who points out very eloquently that it is because we don't understand death, it is because we don't remember it is just waiting around the corner, that we don't consider it as the most important question to be solved on the face of the earth. There are great Western mystics also in the Christian tradition who will say that most of our attention, most of our awareness, goes to irrelevant things, matters irrelevant to living. What is most important is the theme of death, and what is equally urgent is how to overcome it.

To begin with a very small personal example, our cat Charles was here long before we arrived here. And as you all know, Charles is no more as Charles. It is such a small incident, it is such an insignificant episode in the life of our ashram, but as far as I am concerned, it is the most significant event that has taken place this month.

Every evening as I go back to Kripa, he'll try to rub his body against my legs and the girls usually see to it that he doesn't trip me up. His need for affection and his need for expressing affection is so great that he'll come and cross and re-cross at night because the dogs are away from the scene. And when I go in after saying goodnight to Julia and Jessica, he'll come again for his cookie, when everything is quiet and when nobody is coming to chase him. And I usually break up the cookie and put it in front, pat him and stroke him and repeat the mantram. And even two days before he died, he was purring very, very affectionately.

Now I miss him now, miss not being tripped up. Just imagine there is nobody to make me stumble, there is nobody who tries to prevent me from walking on the sidewalk, and I miss all the little impediments he used to place on my return to Kripa.

This is where through years of meditation, if you like to borrow the term that the Buddha uses, *panna, prajna*. It has become such an important subject for me that I ask myself, where has he gone? He's just disappeared. He was here for about ten years and he has just disappeared. Where has he gone? And this question is the beginning of wisdom, the beginning of developing a sense of urgency. And it's not only concerning oneself. You know, as the Gita puts it:

*dehino 'smin yatha dehe kaumaram yauvanam jara
tatha dehantara praptir dhiras tatra na muhyati*

See one night I think I was trying to recite this verse and I was looking at our younger people and I could hardly bring the words out. Because it says, just as you and I were once babies, you and I were once boys and girls, you and I were once in our twenties, similarly, we pass on, the body passes on into middle age, old age, *kaumaram yauvanam jara*, and then, *tatha dehantara*

praptih. Then it sheds its old body, just as a snake sloughs off its skin, takes on a new skin, takes on a new body. And Sri Krishna says, when you learn to rise above the body, to live beyond the clutches of the ego, you understand this – not intellectually – experientially. This is something that the intellect can never grasp. If you ask me what has happened to Woosh, maybe to make myself understood, I would say, Woosh is dead, I mean, Charles is dead, but Charles is not dead. To myself I don't use the term "Charles is dead." All that I say is, Charles, again to use the language of the Gita, the verse that all of you know:

*vasamsi jirnani yatha vihaya navani grihnati naro 'parani
tatha sharirani vihaya jirnany anyani samyati navani dehi*

See just as this pullover, I'll take care of it, very well. As soon as I go back from here I fold it and put it away and wear it only on occasions like this. But even though I may take care of it to the best of my vigilance, one day it is going to be torn and it has to be shed. Sri Krishna is trying to remind us every day that this will help us to remember that, to bring urgency to our *sadhana*, to give us motivation for intensifying it. And not just for ourselves. All our youngest people are very dear to me. It's not only the little ones, but Jessica, Joshua, Julia, all the little children are so dear to me that the greatest gift that I can give them, which my teacher has enabled me to be able to give, is the gift of immortality. And you can read any religious scripture, you can read any great mystic, this is what meditation is for, *sadhana* is about. And no teacher will ever forget that he or she has the greatest gift that the human being can ever receive – how to transcend death here on this earth and enable those around to transcend death around us.

When the term *jiva* is used, *jiva* is the evolving individual creature. From the time the sun was born five billion years ago I have been evolving. You can see how perfectly scientific knowledge and spiritual wisdom come together. One of the very dear Sri Ramakrishna swamis who came here on his way to New York, he asked me out of affection, he said, "How old are you?" I said, "Five billion years." He understood perfectly. And for me it is not just a saying, it is not just a piece of rhetoric. I am five billion years old.

And in order to understand the grandeur of this magnificent concept, we need a tremendous expansion of imagination. And when we have as our backdrop this five billion years and we take our stand against this five billion backdrop, then we begin to understand that it is I myself, it is Bron herself, it is Nick himself, who has been shaping life after life after life through their own personal pattern of living. It's perfectly scientific, utterly reasonable.

And I'm now using very much the language of the Buddha when he will say, for example, Charles . . . all of you know that Charles belonged to a nonvegetarian species and in the early days when on one or two occasions I used to see him driven by his instinct, his compulsion to kill little creatures, it used to upset me very much. But at the same I knew that that was his compulsion. And I thought about it a great deal and started tempting him with cookies. Different kinds of cookies. Oatmeal cookies and special . . . he was particularly fond of

chocolate chip cookies. And I used to bring all kinds of special cookies and I have very little doubt that when he got the urge to kill he used to run to my door and say, "Give me a cookie!" He tried to come in and say, "Give me a cookie, I don't want to kill." And believe me during the last few years he has almost forgotten some of his violent tendencies of his.

And now I'm using the language of the Buddha. He will say, Charles will be born – it is the same Charles, it is the same *jiva* – he will be born as an animal that does not kill. He is very, very reasonable, very, very scientific, won't make a single statement of which he is not sure. He will say, here are cows, right around us, that are very gentle, that are very vegetarian, that give milk and butter and yogurt and cheese for all of us and it is in the highest tradition of the Upanishads, *data*, give. That's why the Hindu very wisely looks upon the cow with great respect because she sets an example. They don't even say *cow*, they'll say "mother cow." Just as the mother gives the child her precious milk, these cows give their precious milk to all of us to sustain life. And Charles, the Buddha would add with his inimitable smile, will be born as a nice little calf, frisking about.

[Section Two]

And the elephant as you know is an animal that is loved and respected very much in India because of the same outlook. Imagine this huge creature, gentle, with its immense strength, so faithful. And as far as devotion to a human being goes, I don't think I have seen any animal who can be so devoted to the *mahout*. And maybe Charles will become an elephant one day. See, starting as a little creature here and becoming a big elephant and carrying the Lord in a temple procession. And the Buddha would add, next time he's a human being. And this is where the Buddha drives it home. Everything is in our hands. When he says, take your salvation into your own hands, work out your own salvation, this is what he is saying. No external power compels you. Remember Shakespeare's "Fault is not in the stars, it is in you and me." [Editor's note: Easwaran is paraphrasing from *Julius Caesar*: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves."]

Now, similarly, when we try to remember, when we see Charles disappearing, now I am trying to express my love for Christo, who as you know must be on his way from New York to Greece now. We know that Christo is going to be away for fifteen days. In fact I have a suspicion he's going to come a little earlier. He's going to ask for his dad. Greece may have gods but Greece doesn't have any dad of Christo's. And we know that after fifteen days he's going to come back. That's why, even though we miss him terribly, we know that he will come back and our happiness will know no bounds. This is because we believe in jets, we believe that there is a country called Greece, that a jet plane can take these people from New York to Athens or Salonika and then a car can drive them from Salonika to their little village. We believe in Greece, we believe in geography, we believe in cars, but we won't believe in the Buddha. This is the Buddha's, it's almost like Socrates, you know, slowly saying, yes, I believe in this, I believe in

that, but what about me? Oh, we'll say . . . this is where the Buddha says, here what we are doing with every thought, we are working on our destiny.

And every time we see an incident like this – Charles disappearing, an older relative disappearing, an older friend disappearing – we have to ask ourselves the question, “Where has he gone? Where has she gone?” And the answer from the depths of your consciousness will be, “She has gone where you are going.” And the Buddha, you know, he loved his little boy so passionately – he was a man capable of tremendous passion – that when he realized that his little boy Rahula will go the same way of Charles, he was so overcome with love that he went to the forest at the foothills of the Himalayas and said, “I will not come back until I find the answer, that I can give as the greatest gift to everyone around me, to everybody who loves me enough to follow my way of life.”

See, this is my teacher's legacy. And very early in life she planted this seed which has become a giant tree. And as the great mystics say, this is the most relevant question in life. Making money, they don't say it is wicked; they say it is irrelevant. As you put it here, you can't take it with you. If you can take it with you, I'd say, make as much as you can. If you can hoard all your pleasures and put them in safe deposit hereafter, enjoy all the pleasures you can. And that phrase “you can't take it with you” is a very practical one and if I were to write a book on karma, I'll say, “You can't help taking it with you.” Work on what you can't help taking with you. Why work on what you can't take with you? Just imagine, packing your boxes, hoarding everything, classifying them, weighing them. Say, “Man, you're not going to take any of these with you.”

Work on what you have to take. And every thought you're going to take with you, every word, every deed. And the Buddha will say, don't blame others, don't point the finger of responsibility at others. You are responsible completely because you can change completely. And even if one is not able to attain nirvana, the Buddha would say, your life will be so good on this earth, it'll be so secure on this earth, you'll be loved and respected by all those around you and, most important of all, you will have your own self-respect. You will know that you are a fountain of love at which those who are thirsty can quench their thirst.

And as the jiva is a continuously evolving individual, just as we pass through childhood and youth and age, similarly, through life after life after life. Now, take Christo, for example. Sultana will come back exactly the same, in a tearing hurry to attend to all the correspondence that is piling up in the office. In fact as soon as she comes here, that's where she is going to go, to see what all is waiting for her on the desk. But Christo will have changed a little. You know he is at a very impressionable age, he will have picked up a few Greek words, Eureka. And see he will have probably become aware of some of the scenes of which he was not aware here. He's a very sensitive fellow and he absorbs easily and he'll probably have new kinds of clothes, new style of walking, and he'll probably come and say that he's no longer a fireman, that he's a *princeps*. You know the old Athenian term, isn't it? That's what he's going to tell us. But we are not going to be fooled. We still know that it is Christo, our Christo. And in the next life, there'll still be a certain

amount of continuity with the samskaras we have developed in this life. And the samskaras which we will have to work out in that life. This is what they mean by saying understanding the continuity of life gives you a tremendous skill in selfless living.

Again, every one of us must be tempted to ask, when we see so much violence on earth, such tragedies taking place all over the world, we cannot help asking the question, why, why, why? And this is where the Buddha says, you see only one little flash that you call this life. If you could see the whole saga of evolution, you'll know that we are responsible for our own life. And there is a poem by . . . short poem by Huxley, which I must have read to you which even Huxley, a good student of the Perennial Philosophy, asks just the opposite question from what I would ask. He says,

A million spermatozoa,
out of their cataclysm, but one poor Noah
dared to survive. And among the trillion minus one
might have chanced to be
Shakespeare, another Newton, another Donne,
but the one was me.

[Editor's note: This is a free rendering from Aldous Huxley's "Fifth Philosopher's Song."] He says it in great surprise, in great amazement. I say, "That's just it, Aldous! It had to be you." And why it's so obvious to me, you can see that Jim has got to be Jim. Among all the trillion there is one little fellow who is going to be a printer and who is going to get our books out and who is going to drive our car and who is very fond of chocolate candy. It had to be like that, you know.

And that's why I said all this is not intellectual. This means I accept myself completely. This is what I mean by experiential knowledge. That this is just the way, the illumined person, according to the Buddha, who says, this is just the way I like to look. This is just the way I like to talk. This is just the way I like to live and this is just the way I made myself into being.

There is such joy in this, no jealousy, no envy, no saying why should it have been otherwise, if only I could have been . . . nothing. Everything is just right. And Swami Vivekananda added, almost towards the close of his life, "I was glad I was born, I was glad I made mistakes and I was glad that I suffered and I am glad that I attained spiritual awareness through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna." Everything falls into a complete pattern. And when you look at all your mistakes – they're all part of your growth. When you look at all the difficulties you have had, all part of your growth. And you say, everything is just right. And you want to, the joy of this, the security of this, the miracle of this, is so great that you want to share it with everybody as freely as they will let you share.

And the whole of one's life becomes a loving service to every kind of creature. Wherever he goes or she goes, they'll find opportunities to serve – the whale, the dolphin, the elephant, the frog, the cow, the lamb, everything.

So, to conclude, it is most urgent, most important for all of us to reflect on this question of death, to see the theater of death opening as I do see every time I see even a little raccoon dying on the road or a little lamb dying on the road. It is not just the raccoon or the lamb I see, I see all those who are dear to me, all those whom I know. And I see in the theater everybody getting ready to go in and be devoured by the King of Death.

And this is where love comes in. I say, I don't want any of you to die. I would do everything in my power to enable everyone who is fond of me, who will respond to me, who will allow myself to inspire and support them to go beyond the threat of death so that they can give this as their greatest gift to their children, to their friends and, I would say, in the Hindu tradition, even to their parents. And every one of us, when we attain spiritual awareness, we give a very grateful gift to our parents. They don't have to claim it, they don't have to ask for it, this is what the unity of life means. And Shankara will say, when we attain illumination, the book of karma is closed, our accounts are closed, and whatever good we do, whatever loving service we do, we have the choice to direct it to those people who love us and who can benefit from that gift.

VERSES

dehino 'smin yatha dehe kaumaram yauvanam jara
tatha dehantarapraptir dhiras tatra na muhyati

As the same person inhabits the body through childhood, youth, and old age, so too at the time of death he or she attains another body. The wise are not deluded by these changes.

Bhagavad Gita Chapter Two, verse thirteen

vasamsi jirnani yatha vihaya
navani grihnati naro 'parani
tatha sharirani vihaya jirnany
anyani samyati navani dehi

As one abandons worn-out clothes and acquires new ones, so when the body is worn out a new one is acquired by the Self, who lives within.

Bhagavad Gita Chapter Two, verse twenty-two

TERMS AND REFERENCES

ashram A spiritual community.

brahmin A member of the priestly caste. In the eyes of the Buddha, however, the true brahmin is not someone who belongs to a particular social position or shows outward insignia of spirituality, but one who has attained stillness of mind.

Christo Son of Sultana and Nick, who are Easwaran's close students.

dipa Island, and also lamp.

Hebbles A dog.

jiva The individual soul as it evolves through many lives.

Kosala An ancient Indian kingdom.

Kripa Grace; Sanskrit name Easwaran gave his residence at the Blue Mountain Center.

mahout One who trains and rides elephants.

Meher Baba (1894–1969) One of the leading saints of modern India.

Muka A dog.

nibbana Pali term for nirvana (see below).

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

panna Pali term for prajna (see below).

prajna A higher mode of knowing, spiritual wisdom.

Ramakrishna, Sri (1836–1886) Born in a small village in Bengal, north India, Sri Ramakrishna lived out his days as a simple priest of the temple to the Divine Mother at Dakshineswar, near Calcutta. Yet he encompassed the spiritual practices of various Hindu paths, Islam, and Christianity. One of his disciples kept a detailed diary, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942).

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.

Samyukta Nikaya Part of the Buddhist canon.

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

Shiva “The auspicious one,” name of one of the Gods of the Hindu trinity.

Sultana A student of Easwaran’s, mother of Christo.

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) Disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who came to the U.S. in the 19th century.

Woosh A cat.

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