

Study Guide for The Spiritual Adventure

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Four Stages of Spiritual Growth

Introduction

The two talks on this tape were given in 1992, when Sri Easwaran returned to public speaking after a life-threatening health crisis. His talks from this period are both urgent and profound, conveying a sense that he bears a message desperately needed by the world.

The first talk, “Four Stages of Spiritual Growth,” is a kind of spiritual autobiography. In it, he divides the history of his spiritual growth into four stages, to which he gives names drawn from the Indian mystical tradition:

Salokya – “In the same world” – entering the spiritual world.

Sarupya – “Form or presence” – sensing a divine presence within.

Samipya – “Nearness” – growing closer to this divine presence.

Sayujya – “Union” – becoming united with the divine within.

This talk will give you a vivid sense of the spiritual journey, and of your place in it.

Understanding where we stand and what challenges lie ahead can help us maintain confidence and momentum in our spiritual life. And seeing how Easwaran met those same challenges brings valuable techniques for meeting them with grace and equanimity.

Practical Exercise

In the first stage of spiritual life that Easwaran presents here – entering the spiritual world – he describes a challenge familiar to most meditators: our interests change as we are increasingly drawn to spiritual things, and for that reason some of our old relationships change or fall away.

Easwaran says that spiritual reading became even more important to him at this point, and helped him remember that his friends’ impression – that he was losing interest in life – was mistaken. He describes it as a kind of expansion: “This was a pushing the walls of beauty further and further. Everything was expanding. Formerly I had been constricted in a small room; now the walls of the room began to expand.”

In this exercise we will follow his lead by turning to spiritual reading – specifically, Easwaran’s *Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living* – for guidance and support. A few times during the coming week, bring a question or problem to this three-volume set (or to another of Easwaran’s books, if you don’t have the *Gita*).

First, identify a problem or question that requires your attention. It may be a disagreement with a co-worker or friend, or it may be a persistent negative thought, or a habit you'd like to change. Once you've spotted it, try to look beneath the surface in your own consciousness to identify the underlying spiritual challenge. Note that you are looking at your own responses and reactions, not the other person's, because the only thing we can control in any relationship is our own mind. For instance, the challenge hidden in a quarrel may be your tendency to anger, or a lack of patience, or inflated self-will expressed as a desire to have your own way. (Please note – this approach doesn't attempt to decide who's right or wrong in the disagreement, but simply to identify the spiritual challenge that is present for you, the opportunity for spiritual growth, regardless of the details.) Finally, open the index in the *Gita* and look up the entries for that subject. Try various sections "on for size." Once you've found one that speaks to you, you may want to review it several times, or copy it into a notebook, as if you had just received advice in person from Easwaran.

Recommended Reading

Chapter 8, "Reading the Mystics," in *Meditation*.

Suggested Passage for Meditation

Prayers from the Rig Veda, "May we be united in heart."

Transcript: Four Stages of Spiritual Growth

July 21, 1992

The spiritual life as I present it is living at its very best, physically, mentally, intellectually, and, of course, spiritually. In order to develop this victorious pattern of living, the Eight Point Program that I have followed for the last forty years is one that I would recommend wholeheartedly to anyone who is capable of determination, dedication, and devotion.

This evening I would like to talk about what may be called four stages, represented by the Sanskrit words [*salokya*](#), [*sarupya*](#), [*samipya*](#), [*sayujya*](#). So, in order to convey a practical commentary on these words I am going to draw upon my own gradual spiritual development.

The first word, *salokya* – *loka* means world. *Salokya* here is the spiritual world. Just as you have the botanical world or zoological world, in the same sense the spiritual world is used as *loka*.

I was introduced to the glorious treasury of English literature by my uncle, who was an extremely effective teacher in my high school. When he opened the doors, I had never imagined such wealth of beauty, such unending variety of character, such lovely landscapes, and such enjoyable

humor in the world of English literature. I was hardly sixteen and I fell under the spell of it for many, many years. Romeo and Juliet were more real to me than Sarah and her boyfriend. Othello and Desdemona were more real to me than the friends I had. I am not making a rhetorical statement; I got more interested in them, I got more satisfaction in their company. I used to dream about them, in the forest of [Arden](#). I must have met Rosalind many times, because what you think about, what you read about, what you dwell about – that is what you dream about.

Then, through the grace of God, which to me came through the grace of my grandmother, who is my teacher, and through personal contact with [Mahatma Gandhi](#), I slowly began to turn inwards, little by little – [poco a poco](#). And I want you to know that I continued to function very well as a professor, very devoted to my students, and with a wide variety of cultural interests: drama, music, dancing, and even a touch of soccer and tennis.

Now gradually, almost without my knowledge my interests began to change. When I would go to the library, instead of going to the Shakespeare section to get those huge volumes of [Furness](#), which you can use for weight lifting, my eyes would wander to sections dealing with mystical literature, which is a very rich, very fascinating one. For example, I began to get interested in [Aldous Huxley's Perennial Philosophy](#), which is a very helpful guide to the world's mystical literature. I began to read [Evelyn Underhill](#) on mysticism, and from there I slowly went to the mystics themselves. Teresa of Avila – if I were to go to Spain now, where the Olympic Games will be beginning next week, you may not believe it, but that's not where I would go. I would go to Avila. That is where the greatest games were played, through which Teresa saw.

And when I had to make my choice, with Christine, between going to see the [Taj Mahal](#) and [Vrindavan](#), where Sri Krishna lived, we chose, not the Taj Mahal – I still haven't seen the Taj Mahal – but I have seen Sri Krishna residing in my heart.

So, my fields of interest began to change. The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* began to consume my passion, and you can notice in yourself as your spiritual awareness grows that the books you read, the books you study, the books that help you are those left by the great mystics themselves, whether by [Jalaluddin Rumi](#) or [Ansari of Herat](#) in the Sufi tradition, or by the Compassionate Buddha – the [Dhammapada](#) – or the [Upanishads](#), the earliest source and the purest source of the Perennial Philosophy, and the [Bhagavad Gita](#), which is, as Gandhi calls it, our daily reference book of living. There is no problem to which you cannot find a solution in the Gita, and there is no limit to the height to which you can grow by practicing the teachings of the Gita.

So, you are beginning to enter the spiritual world, and instead of attending lectures on the development of the sonnet, as I used to, from the Petrarchian to the Spenserian, or on the sources of *Hamlet*, or the use of imagination for property in the Elizabethan play, which were all enthralling subjects, I discovered that they had nothing to do with life, which I had never discovered. And I was very reassured that there were a great number of great scholars who still

hadn't discovered that. And I began to get interested in books, people—particularly the mystics—who began to throw light on life.

So, in *salokya* some of my old friends began to look askance at me; as soon as they saw me coming, they would go down the next lane. And when we were gathered together they would have very little to say for themselves, because they thought that I had lost interest in my students, in my subject—nothing of the kind at all. This was a pushing the walls of beauty further and further. Everything was expanding. Formerly I had been constricted in a small room; now the walls of the room began to expand, and I became more and more interested in nature—not because of poetry only, but because I began to see a strange light on the face of nature.

So, I began to see a new light where I had seen old beauty as described by the poets, and St. Teresa of Avila would say, in epic words, I began to live in the light without a night. There was always an effulgence around me; there was always radiance in my heart. Even when the times were bad, even when the times were hard, I could still bask in that light, bathe in that light, which is one of the universal experiences of early mysticism in all the great religions.

Then, I began to feel the stirrings of a presence deep inside. It wasn't what I had heard, it wasn't what I had read; it was actually what I personally began to experience: the quiet stirrings, if you like to call it, of a Presence, of a Being who to me is Sri Krishna. And all my desires slowly began to come together: the desire for pleasure, the desire for profit, the desire for prestige, the desire for fame – all these began to come together naturally – very painfully, because I still valued them and I still couldn't renounce them voluntarily and completely.

So I began to sense that, in order to understand that Presence, the very best way was turning inwards in meditation. And as I read the sixth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, it dawned upon me, through a great wave of inspiration from Sri Krishna, how to meditate. So the method of meditation that is associated with my name in every country today is directly from the sixth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. And I adapted it, systematized it for our modern needs, because I lived in a modern world, and that is how I arrived at using the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi by memorizing. I say learn it by heart, sit quietly with your spinal column erect, close your eyes, and then go through the words of the Prayer: "Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace." At any time a distraction comes in, don't resist the distraction, give your attention more to the prayer, and if you find that your mind has wandered away to the swimming pool, or to the bakery shop, bring your mind back, start it again: "Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace."

And it was after I began to sink below the surface level of consciousness that I realized, I was like a little baby learning to walk, like Rick's little boy, learning to walk, falling down, getting up, falling down, getting up.

But there was such an intense desire to understand the stirrings inside, maybe even to look at the stirrings going on inside, in the depths of consciousness, that I reorganized my whole living timetable. I had a very responsible job at a great university in Central India, and I loved my

students, just as my students loved me, but I rewrote my schedule to give me longer periods of meditation. And during my summer vacation, when I would come home to the Blue Mountain, when our little nieces – who are big girls now – would come and sit on my lap, I wouldn't know, I wouldn't even be aware. In other words, that is what you should look for if you want to know how well you are doing in your meditation. How much of your body have you lost awareness of? This happens to everybody: to great artists, when you are completely lost in appreciating a great musician or a great dancer, or a great tennis champion or a great soccer champion—you are hardly aware of your body, your concentration is so complete. But this is outside. In my case, it was inside.

And I began to understand that, through the grace of God, I was getting closer and closer to the very source where the Divine Self lives in all of us.

The next is *samipya*. As you begin to get closer to God, to quote a Western mystic, you become to God what your right arm is unto yourself. It is as if God stands behind you, takes hold of your arms and uses them for carrying out selfless, difficult, significant work to relieve suffering wherever it is found, to bring in joy where there is sorrow, to bring in consolation where there is misery, to bring in pardon where there is injury, to bring in light where there is darkness. It is as if there is a power behind you, pushing you very skillfully from behind, moving your arms, moving your heart, moving your creative faculties, so that you are able to be inspired to undertake great tasks, which are beyond ordinary human capacity.

So we have *salokya*, *samipya*, *sarupya*. Now *sayujya*. The root is *yuj*, from which the word comes: *yoga*. The ultimate triumph of the human spirit, the apotheosis of the human spirit is when it becomes one with God, not after death – that's the glory of our tradition – here, while on the face of the earth, while in [Petaluma](#), on the banks of the river. This can be done by people with determination, dedication, and devotion, without dropping out of school, without leaving their family, without changing their religion, without going to another country. It's the transformation of the internal life that is the most difficult and the most rewarding, if only we could understand it even intellectually.

In the supreme climax of meditation called [samadhi](#), the senses swoon, because they are used to only tuppenny ha'penny pleasure. The body faints. The senses, the mind – the mind becomes still. And no words, no thoughts can ever describe the supreme felicity of this state, as a great mystic, [Shankara](#), from my state of Kerala says: How can you describe the indescribable? How can you capture in words that from which words and thoughts come back frightened?

Afterwards we are not a separate human creature; we appear as human creatures, but we are not separate, because we are always touching God who is the source of our joy, the source of our love, and the source of our power.

Many, many great figures: Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, Ansari of Herat, Jalaluddin Rumi, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Ramakrishna, [Meerabai](#), [Kabir](#), the Buddha, Shankara—they have all

reached this state. And even after we have reached this supreme state, our mystics unanimously proclaim, after the body has been shed in death, you can still come back, to take on a new body – young, healthy, strong, beautiful – to carry on the work you left off, of saving the forests, saving the topsoil, saving the purity of air and water, and putting an end to war, because, as the song said, when you are able to live in complete harmony, there will never be war, there will never be violence, there will never be discrimination, and there will never be prosperity in one land and famine in another. This is what the spiritual life means.

So, please aim for the highest in this life, and to remember that all of us have a part to play in learning to live in harmony with ourselves, in harmony with other races and other nations, and in harmony with the environment.

Exploring Inner Space

Introduction

In this talk, Easwaran uses the simile of space travel to describe in fascinating terms the adventure of self-discovery. His tone is playful and often humorous, but his insights go right to the deepest and most practical questions of the spiritual life.

He begins by reminding us that, just as we have a physical body, with which astronauts have explored outer space, we all have a subtle body of thoughts, feelings, and desires which is “as real as the physical body, though its processes do not come under the tyranny of physical measurement.” Though only a few people can be astronauts, all of us have the capacity to be “atmanauts” using meditation and the allied disciplines to voyage through the inner world and discover our real Self, called the Atman in Sanskrit.

With a light touch, Easwaran goes on to find inner parallels for many of the twentieth century’s fascinating discoveries about outer space. In the process he gives useful perspectives on the challenges faced by meditators, such as maintaining motivation and dealing with “dry periods.” And he concludes with a stirring encouragement to go as deep as we can in meditation, because the world needs the generosity, compassion, and forgiveness that our practice can bring.

Practical Exercise

One of the most remarkable aspects of this talk is Easwaran’s description of “dry periods” as “islands in the vast world within . . . where you can rest, you can recuperate.” In this exercise we will work on improving our ability to traverse these dry periods with our meditation practice intact, and even to benefit from them.

Dry periods in meditation – those periods when we don’t feel progress, and when our practice doesn’t bring us any satisfaction – are times when we should not make decisions according to our feelings. Rather, we need to learn to “fly by the instruments” just as airplane pilots steer their planes according to their instrument panel when fog or clouds make it impossible to see clearly. In other words, when we are not feeling inspired or enthusiastic, we can still find spiritual sustenance (and make steady progress in meditation) by practicing spiritual disciplines *as if* we felt enthusiasm. By making such effort without any desire for results, we can discover the special “recuperative” power of dry periods.

Here is a list of practices that will help during dry periods. If you are experiencing such a period now, pick one and try it out. If your practice is rewarding and inspiring now, you can use this exercise to prepare for the next dry period.

- Read through *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* and make a list of passages that you would like to memorize. Choose one to start with and read it once or more every day.
- List all the passages you use for meditation, and organize (or reorganize) them. Put them in a new order, or renew your acquaintance with a passage you've stopped using.
- Reorganize your daily schedule, giving a more prominent place to spiritual activities in your day. For instance, make an extra effort to get some spiritual companionship; try meditating before exercising rather than after; or go for a mantram walk before your evening meditation; or do ten minutes of spiritual reading before your morning meditation.
- Reorganize your health habits: move towards a healthier diet based on fresh vegetables and fruits; be more regular about your exercise routine.
- Videotaped talks by Easwaran are a very potent form of *darshan* as the practice of visiting the teacher is called in India. You can find great benefit by setting aside some time – not just to watch the tapes, but to give them your deepest one-pointed attention, thereby entering into the presence of a great teacher.

While you are undertaking these exercises, don't expect a miraculous change in your outlook (or any change at all!). Just make gentle modifications to your routine and continue your practice without reference to how you feel. With time, you will find that you've developed a refreshing independence from results, and a deeper confidence in your ability to make steady spiritual progress.

Recommended Reading

Chapter 7, "Spiritual Companionship," in *Meditation*.

Suggested Passage for Meditation

Meera, "The Path to Your Dwelling."

Transcript: Exploring Inner Space

March 17, 1992

It is said in our ancient spiritual tradition that we have two kinds of bodies, *sthula* and *sukshma*. *Sthula* is the physical body, with which we usually identify ourselves, and I must acknowledge, with gratitude, the great work done in this country to contribute to the understanding of our physical body, which is the basis of modern medicine.

The sages of ancient India state on the basis of their own personal experience that all of us have another body, too, called *sukshma*, which is nonphysical, actually the word means subtle. The physical body can be measured. Its processes can be observed. But the subtle body that consists of thoughts, feelings, and desires is as real as the physical body though its processes do not come under the tyranny of physical measurement.

In order to lead a victorious life, contributing to our family, country, and the world, it calls for an adequate mastery of the physical world and an adequate mastery of the interior world, of which modern civilization knows next to nothing.

To give you an example from what is called new physics, an electron can appear as a particle, or it can appear as a wave, according to the position taken by the observer. This is one of the fundamental principles in our civilization, that there is a state which goes beyond the duality of the observer and the observed. That is what the climax of meditation leads to in [samadhi](#), *sama* with, *adhi* Lord. I am not separate from God. God is not separate from me. This is the unitive state, for discovering which all of us have come into this world, and until we make this discovery, as the Buddha would say, we have not done what we have to do, and therefore there will be a great deal of suffering and sorrow, even though we may live successful lives in prosperous countries.

In order to convey the immense challenges and the considerable risks which this tremendous discovery, made by Francis of Assisi in the West, Mahatma Gandhi in India, I am going to draw a parallel between traveling in outer space and traveling in inner space, which is as vast, as uncharted, and as difficult and dangerous to traverse as outer space.

It was a brilliant Russian schoolteacher who came up with the original concept that we can learn to travel in outer space with the help of rockets, and all the great space experts, including our own [Wernher von Braun](#), have followed in his footsteps. You call them astronauts, whether it is [Neil Armstrong](#) or [Yuri Gagarin](#). We call them, in my phrase, *atmanauts*. I have tremendous admiration for the scientific and technological work that has gone into our men walking on the moon, which I myself saw on television on one of the rare occasions when I look at it. I wrote to my mother saying that I had seen two chaps walking on the moon, and I don't think until now she believes this can be done because it cannot be done.

So, when I started talking to the [beatniks](#) about some of our great men and women through the last five thousand years who have landed on the atman and come back with a slide show, which is what the [Upanishads](#) is, they were very kind people, very courteous in their language. They said, “We are fond of you. We like to look at you, we like to listen to you, but we cannot buy this.” I don’t think any of them could bring themselves to believe, just what my mother couldn’t bring herself to believe, that we have sent people to walk on the moon.

So I looked at a little book yesterday. I don’t read books about books. If I want to know what is the personal experience of going into outer space, I want to read the diary of somebody who went to outer space, and [Sally Ride](#) has written a little book for children like me, going to outer space and coming back. I wish I had that book, I could have shown it to my mother, who was very partial to women.

She says there are three aspects of travel in space, outer or inner: propulsion, navigation, and destination, and just as these astronauts had to undergo long, rigorous training, atmanauts also have to undergo much more long, much more rigorous training, for many, many years.

If you want a simile, we are all familiar with the jet propulsion lab in Pasadena. This hall is a jet propulsion lab in [Petaluma](#), and I am the travel agent, the air steward, and the co-pilot. After you have qualified for this most stupendous voyage, the first great leap by mankind, you walk towards a shuttle which Sally Ride says is thirty stories high. Our mental shuttle is only seven stories high, corresponding to the seven centers of consciousness, whether described by Western mystics or by Indian mystics.

All of us have been given the space suit. This is what this brown space suit has been given to me for this purpose, to make the ultimate voyage into the uncharted immensity of inner space, where there are many dangers, endless challenges, lurking from beginning to end, and it is Wernher von Braun who says if you have mastered the laws of outer space, you can travel safely through outer space, even through dangerous areas like the [Van Allen belt](#). Similarly, if you have mastered the laws of inner space you can travel safely into the very depths of the unconscious, where equally dangerous forces – greed, fear, and anger – lurk to vanquish even the most daring, and the most experienced travellers. Just as we lost the [Challenger](#), India has lost many challengers on this immense internal odyssey.

I was looking at a picture, and on either side of the shuttle are two rockets, because the question of fuel was a very important one. They use liquid hydrogen, or liquid oxygen, sometimes solidified also, in order to provide the great velocity required to escape from the law of gravity, and in the internal shuttle which I shall call *chitta*, consciousness, we need to have in one rocket extraordinary enthusiasm, which is what my initials stand for. I have had extraordinary enthusiasm for this mysterious voyage for the last forty years, and still haven’t lost it.

So the first rocket, the fuel is extraordinary enthusiasm. Most people who have played with the toys of life know that they are toys we have to throw away after a while, and these are the people on whom I draw for my atmanauts, in their space suits.

The other rocket is devotion, for which human effort is not very effective. In a very good sense, I have learned to be as determined as the most determined American in this country, and I have the devotion of the greatest devotee in my former country, India. It's a very rare combination, extraordinary enthusiasm, or as Teresa of Avila would say, *determinacion* that can never be broken. But that itself is not enough. That needs to be combined with unfathomable devotion.

So the two rockets are ready, the voyagers are seated inside and they are strapped in their seats for the chitta spacecraft the Bhagavad Gita says we can strap ourselves. [*Samam kaya shiro grivam dharayan achalam sthirah.*](#) Sit with the back of your head and your neck and your back in one straight line. It's not easy to maintain.

And one of my venerable friends, who went to the Himalayas, was so established in this posture, motionless posture, that deer used to come and rub their bodies against his shoulders, without his being aware of it. In my humbler case our little girls, who are big girls now, they used to come and sit on my lap without my being quite aware of it.

That is how you test your meditation. When concentration is complete, when your contemplation on God is full and thorough, you will not be aware of your body at all. The senses would have closed down, and in the spacecraft, in the shuttle that went to the moon, they established a moon base, and they were able to hear with their radio telescope, signals from the depths of the universe, because everything was still. There was no interference from earth at all.

Similarly, when our shuttle chitta has soared into orbit, with one rocket full of determination and the other full of devotion, then when we reach the supreme state, as the Bible puts it, "[Be still,](#)" and everything is still. St. Augustine has a beautiful description of this stillness. It is in this stillness that you hear the [*pranava*](#), the supreme cosmic sound, AUM.

That is why, to many mantrams, including the Jesus prayer, [Aum or Om is added]. In my mother tongue it is *Om Jesu Christu*. There is *Om Mani Padme Hum*. Om is the cosmic sound, we can add *Om Kyrie Eleison*, *Om Gospodi Pomilui*, *Om Subhan Allah*, glory to God.

While, on these long voyages into outer space, there are now plans, I understand, for building colonies or islands, or they even say, Hilton Hotels, where people can rest and recuperate. Meditation is a very strenuous process, gathering the fissiparous activities of the mind, unifying all the desires that go out in search of satisfaction; it's a very strenuous, very fatiguing and very tiring process. So there are islands in the vast world within, colonies in the vast world within where you can rest, you can recuperate. And these periods are often misinterpreted by us – even enthusiastic [sadhaks](#) – as dry periods, when nothing is taking place.

In the Western tradition it is the dark night of the soul, but in our glorious tradition our sages say in these periods go to meet a person who is aware of God, listen to him, listen to her, look at him, look at her, and you will come back refreshed, reinvigorated, re-inspired to continue your voyage.

The two words that are beautifully used in Sanskrit are *darshan* (it means “to see”) and *sparshan* (“to touch”). That’s why our sages send their grace through darshan and sparshan to all those who are consumed by this desire to reach the destination which is awareness of God, becoming united with God.

Now another of the far-reaching projects [which] to me sounds very dubious, is in course of time to mine the moon for valuable materials that can be catapulted down to earth. You can see how greed follows us everywhere. This is a very well-written book, these are well-written books, but the ideas are completely physically oriented. Before the sun burns out we want to find another home so that we can do to it what we have done to this beautiful earth of ours. I am a great admirer of science and technology, but I am not for colonizing other planets until we have made this planet peaceful, green, prosperous, and lovable as the children of one big family.

But just as these valuable minerals can be mined on the moon, on Mars or anywhere else, in meditation we can mine the precious jewels the atman wears. There is a beautiful song where Sri Ramakrishna sings, “Dive deep, dive deep, O mind.” That is where all the pearls lie. We can all, if we dive deep enough, for a period of decades. We can bring up our original goodness, our original compassion, our original generosity, and our original forgiveness, which are all the jewels that the atman wears.

I would ask every one of you to be regular, sustained in your meditation, not just for your sake only, not even for your family’s sake only, but our country needs it so direly. Every day the papers and the periodicals which I look at cry out for this kind of gift of pearls to our children, to our young people, who are losing their way very fast.

Sally Ride expresses with great humor some of the entertaining side about the loss of weight, weightlessness. She says, it’s a most enjoyable phenomenon. In the Olympics, if some weightless person entered, he could walk away or she could walk away with all the medals. And she says, while reading, she doesn’t have to hold the book. The book floats. She has only to do this. And they have got all kinds of ingenious ways of having their meals. Somebody was having his meals on the ceiling, and assuring the people below, “Nothing is going to drop on your head.”

So she says, in floating you can go anywhere you like, without effort, and I can to a small extent illustrate from my own experience, the loss of body consciousness, which comes after many, many years of meditation will enable you to relate effortlessly to people, effortlessly to nature, effortlessly to every creature on the face of the earth.

That is why our Upanishads say your joy will be multiplied a millionfold. If you love one person, the Upanishads say, make it one unit of joy. When you love five billion people, fifty billion

creatures, you are not able to contain your joy. That's why Francis says if this joy were to continue, my life would melt away. Kabir says, "If all the forests were made into paper and if the sea were turned to ink, even then I would not be able to describe the joy of this supreme love, which is the source of all joy."

So let us have a countdown before you start meditating. I will do it in the Indian way. Das, nav, at, sat . . . ek, Rama Rama Rama Rama, and chitta goes up.

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Weekly Lesson Plan

This is a four-lesson curriculum, which can be used as a guide to studying this tape. It is written as a format for Blue Mountain Center Fellowship Groups, but it can be equally valuable for individual use. Simply leave yourself an hour and a half to complete the lesson, and use the discussion questions to prompt your personal reflections. It can be helpful to record your reflections in a notebook.

Lesson One

Introduction

This month our exercises will focus on skills that can help us maintain a steady course of spiritual growth, even when we find ourselves lacking in enthusiasm or in support from people around us. In this week's videotaped talk by Easwaran, he is telling the story of his own spiritual growth, as divided into four stages. [Here you might read the introduction to the tape, above.]

Discussion Question

In the first stage of spiritual life that Easwaran presents – entering the spiritual world – he describes a challenge familiar to most meditators: our interests change as we are increasingly drawn to spiritual things, and for that reason some of our old relationships change or fall away.

Easwaran says that spiritual reading became even more important to him at this point, and helped him remember that his friends' impression – that he was losing interest in life – was mistaken. He describes it as a kind of expansion: "This was a pushing the walls of beauty further and further. Everything was expanding. Formerly I had been constricted in a small room; now the walls of the room began to expand."

Please reflect briefly on how this process has been for you, and how you have drawn support from spiritual reading and from spiritual fellowship to maintain your resolve to meditate daily. In what other ways have you used the Eight Points to keep your motivation intact?

When it's time for inspiration, watch the first talk on this tape, "Four Stages of Spiritual Growth," which is 28 minutes long. For those not using the videotapes, read Chapter 8, "Reading the Mystics," in Easwaran's book *Meditation*. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

Lesson Two

Introduction

This month our focus is on skills that can help us maintain a steady course of spiritual growth, even when we find ourselves lacking in enthusiasm or in support from people around us.

Discussion Question

This week, we will practice a special form of Reading the Mystics. We will be using the *Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living* as a reference book for questions or challenges we're dealing with.

For individual reflection, please see the exercise for "Four Stages of Spiritual Growth" above. This exercise is well suited to individual reflection.

In a group session, we recommend that you read the exercise aloud and give members a few minutes of quiet time to do their own reflection. Then, before any discussion, go through the index to the Gita and read aloud various sections on the following topics (which probably play a part in most of the challenges individuals are facing): anger or resentment; fear or insecurity; greed, competition, or envy; lethargy or *tamas*.

After each reading, ask the group for comments, then move on to another reading.

Set aside 45 minutes for this exercise. It will be important to set time limits for each person's item, so that everyone in the group has a chance to suggest a topic. At the end of the session, take the last 15 minutes to reread the sections without comments.

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

Lesson Three

Introduction

This week we will be reflecting on one of the most difficult obstacles on the spiritual path: dry periods. In the videotaped talk we'll watch today, Easwaran will be making a surprising comment about such periods. He refers to them as "islands in the vast world within . . . where you can rest, you can recuperate." In our discussion we will work on improving our ability to traverse these dry periods with our meditation practice intact, and even to benefit from them.

Discussion Question

Dry periods in meditation – those periods when we don't feel progress, and when our practice doesn't bring us any satisfaction – are times when we should not make decisions by our feelings. Rather, we need to learn to “fly by the instruments” just as airplane pilots steer their planes according to their instrument panel when fog or clouds make it impossible to see clearly. In other words, when we are not feeling inspired or enthusiastic, we can still find spiritual sustenance (and make progress in meditation) by practicing spiritual disciplines *as if* we felt enthusiasm. By making such effort without any desire for results, we can discover the special “recuperative” power of dry periods. Just as when we recuperate from exertion or an ailment, we take good care of ourselves and don't undertake new projects or expect ourselves to feel great, so during these periods we can give the same kind of loving, patient care to our spiritual state without expecting great changes in our behavior or outlook.

How might you use the Eight Points to get through a dry spell in that way? What would help you maintain your faith in the Eight Points when you're not feeling any enthusiasm? How has spiritual companionship helped?

When it's time for inspiration, watch the second talk on this tape, “Exploring Inner Space,” which is 33 minutes long. For those not using the videotapes, read from Chapter 7, “Spiritual Companionship,” in Easwaran's book *Meditation*. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

Lesson Four

Introduction

This week we are continuing with the topic of dealing with dry periods in meditation.

Discussion Question

Here is a list of practices that will help during dry periods. Have you tried any of these? It's sometimes very difficult to make this kind of effort when you're in a dry period. What might help you be prepared to do that?

- Read through *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* and make a list of passages that you would like to memorize. Choose one to start with and read it once or more every day.

- List all the passages you use for meditation, and organize (or reorganize) them. Put them in a new order, or renew your acquaintance with a passage you've stopped using.
- Reorganize your schedule, giving a new place to spiritual activities in your day. For instance, make an extra effort to get some spiritual companionship; try meditating before exercising rather than after; or go for a mantram walk before your evening meditation; or do ten minutes of spiritual reading before your morning meditation.
- Reorganize your health habits: move towards a healthier diet based on fresh vegetables and fruits; be more regular about your exercise routine.
- Videotaped talks by Easwaran are a very potent form of *darshan* as the practice of visiting the teacher is called in India. You can find great benefit in setting aside some time – not just to watch the tapes, but to give them your deepest one-pointed attention, thereby entering into the presence of a great teacher.

While you are undertaking these exercises, don't expect a miraculous change in your outlook (or any change at all!). Just make gentle modifications to your routine and continue your practice without reference to how you feel. With time, you will find that you've developed a refreshing independence from results, and a deeper confidence in your ability to make steady spiritual progress.

When it's time for inspiration, please read Chapter 7, "Spiritual Companionship," in Easwaran's book *Meditation*. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

Terms & References

Arden The forest setting of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, in which Rosalind is a major character.

Armstrong, Neil The first person on the moon.

ashram A spiritual community.

Atman "Self"; the innermost soul in every creature, which is divine.

Beatnik A person of the beat generation with an unconventional social philosophy.

Augustine, Saint (354-430) One of the founders of the Western Christian tradition.

Bhagavad Gita "The Lord's Song." The best known of the Hindu scriptures. It is a spiritual dialogue between Arjuna, representing the human soul, and Sri Krishna, the supreme Self. Here, the sixth chapter of the Gita is referred to: "The Practice of Meditation."

Challenger The space shuttle that crashed in January 1986.

chitta Mind-stuff; undifferentiated consciousness.

Christine Eknath Easwaran's wife.

darshana [drish 'to see'] Seeing; audience (especially with a spiritual person).

Dhammapada "The Path of Dharma" – of the central law that all of life is one. The main Buddhist scripture of the sixth century B.C.

Francis (of Assisi), Saint (c. 1181-1226) Christian mystic.

Furness, Horace Howard (1833–1912) Famous Shakespeare scholar.

Gandhi(ji), Mahatma (1869-1948) Led India to freedom through a thirty-year struggle based completely on nonviolence. Eknath Easwaran met Gandhi at his ashram.

Gagarin, Yuri A Russian who was the first man in space.

Herat, Ansari of (1006-1088) Persian poet and mystic in the Sufi tradition of Islam.

Huxley, Aldous (1894-1963) English writer; author of *The Perennial Philosophy*.

Kabir A fifteenth-century Indian mystic and saint.

Meerabai Medieval Indian mystic.

Patanjali Indian sage and philosopher, author of the *Yoga Sutra*.

Petaluma Name of a local town.

poco a poco (Spanish) Little by little.

pranava The supreme cosmic sound, Om (or *aum*).

Ride, Sally The first American woman in space. Her book is entitled *To Space and Back*.

Rumi, Jalaluddin (c.1207-1273) A poet and mystic of the Sufi tradition within Islam.

sadhak A spiritual aspirant.

salokya "In the same world," entering the spiritual world.

samadhi [*sam* 'with'; *adhi* 'Lord'] Union with the Lord; a state of intense concentration in which consciousness is completely unified.

samipya "Nearness," growing closer to this divine presence.

sarupya "Form or presence," sensing a divine presence within.

sayujya "Union," – becoming united with the divine within.

Shankara (c.788-820) A Hindu mystic from Eknath Easwaran's state of Kerala.

Taj Mahal Indian mausoleum of the Mughal empress Mumtaz Mahal.

Underhill, Evelyn (1875-1941) English writer. Her main book is *Mysticism*.

Upanishads India's ancient scriptures dating to 1500 B.C.E.

Van Allen belt A radiation belt around the earth, discovered by the astronomer James Van Allen.

von Braun, Wernher (1912-1977) German-born scientist who played a key role in America's space program.

Vrindavan Historic birthplace of Sri Krishna.

yoga [yuj 'to unite'] Union; a path to Self Realization.

References

samam kaya shiro grivam dharayan acalam stirah

“Hold your body, head, and neck firmly in a straight line” – Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 6, Verse 13

samam = same

kaya = body

shiras = head

grivam = neck

acalam = unmoving, still

sthirah = fixed, firm

'*samam-kaya-shiro-grivam*' is a compound word meaning “(trunk of) body, head, and neck in the same (line).”

“Be still, and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)

How to Use This Course

This video is part of an ongoing monthly series in the teachings of Eknath Easwaran. The talks on this tape, like all of Easwaran's talks, are rich and deep in content. They shed light on many aspects of life, but their true value emerges as we try to apply their teachings in our daily lives. The *Guide* is meant to be used in conjunction with a daily practice of Easwaran's Eight Point Program, based on passage meditation. We do not recommend following the Practical Exercises if you are not practicing this program according to the instructions given in Easwaran's book *Meditation*, which can be found on our Web site, www.nilgiri.org. A brief list of those points can be found at the back of this *Guide*.

The Practical Exercises are suggestions for you to explore as they seem appropriate in your life. If you are already familiar with Easwaran's books, you will have seen some of these exercises before. But we suggest that you take this opportunity to really put them into practice, and discover their great power to deepen your spiritual life. Try them in moderation, exercising your common sense and not taking them to extreme lengths. Easwaran always emphasized the importance of the middle path.

Before or after watching each talk, we suggest that you read through the notes and the Practical Exercise. Then, after watching the talk, try to put the exercise into action in your life. A week or so later, you may find it interesting to watch the talk again, with the experience of the exercise fresh in your mind. You may want to note the results in a journal.

A full listing of our fellowship groups (called Satsangs) is available on our Web site. For more information about this series, other publications of Easwaran and Nilgiri Press, and a schedule of retreats based on the Eight Point Program, please contact

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