

Study Guide for **The Transforming Power of Prayer**

Note: This file contains hyperlinks. When viewing it on your computer, point the cursor at the underlined text and click to see the definition or reference. To return to your place in the text, click the “back” button.

Table of Contents

Gandhi, Man of God

[Introduction](#)

[Practical Exercise](#)

[Recommended Reading](#)

[Suggested Passage for Meditation](#)

[Transcript](#)

To Love Is to Know Is to Act

[Introduction](#)

[Practical Exercise](#)

[Recommended Reading](#)

[Suggested Passage for Meditation](#)

[Transcript](#)

Weekly Lesson Plan (for use by individuals and fellowship groups)

[Lesson One](#)

[Lesson Two](#)

[Lesson Three](#)

[Lesson Four](#)

[How to Use This Course](#)

Gandhi, Man of God

Introduction

The first talk on this tape expresses Easwaran's profound appreciation for Mahatma Gandhi's spiritual depths. He has chosen excerpts from Gandhi's writings that reveal the restless striving for growth which marked Gandhi's inner life. Though this interior work rarely receives as much attention as Gandhi's tremendous external achievements, Easwaran considers Gandhi first and foremost a "spiritual giant."

The special character of his greatness is summed up by Easwaran in the phrase "proud humility." On the one hand, Gandhi was vividly aware of his own drawbacks, and freely admitted them. On the other hand, he pursued his goal of self-transformation with a dedication founded on complete faith that he could eventually "see God face to face."

In Easwaran's presentation, Gandhi's example gives guidance and inspiration for all who share his struggle to reconcile a desire to be perfect with a growing awareness of personal limitations. For such people, Gandhi's – and Easwaran's – "proud humility" is a sure path to steady progress

Practical Exercise

In this talk, Easwaran gives a surprising definition of perfection: "When Jesus asks us to be 'perfect as your father in heaven is perfect,' he's asking us to try our level best." ([Click here to read the context in the transcript.](#))

In this exercise, we will explore what it means to pursue this "level best" kind of perfection. During the next week or two, try to deepen your meditation just a little bit—"spatially, one millimeter." To do this, try some of the suggestions he gives in this talk:

- Memorize a new inspirational passage.
- Be more alert in meditation and fight sleep more assiduously, especially when the passage begins to get "vague."
- Be sure to do some inspirational reading before you go to bed, and try to fall asleep in the mantram. "That puts you in the mood for meditation in the morning."
- Pay special attention to the way you spend your time: "The way you are kind to others, the way you concentrate on your work, and the way that you remind yourself what the goal of life is, all these play a part in improving meditation."

If you do this exercise diligently there will probably be times when you feel far from perfect. Such “failures” are essential on the spiritual path, and are valuable indicators of where we can try harder. Guilt is not a useful response. Rather, simply note that this is an area that requires more effort, and concentrate on whatever you now have in front of you.

As Easwaran says, “Gandhi is reminding us that we are all full of faults. There is no need to get discouraged. We try to get over one . . . two . . . three, gradually, so that our meditation will deepen, our relationships will deepen, and our awareness of God will deepen in the long run.”

Recommended Reading

Chapter 3, “Mother and Child” in *Gandhi the Man*.

Suggested Passage for Meditation

Mahatma Gandhi, “The Path.”

Gandhi, Man of God

June 3, 1989

Transcript of the Talk

I shall be continuing my practical commentary on some of the special statements made by [Mahatma Gandhi](#), which throw a flood of light on our [sadhana](#). Gandhi calls his autobiography *My Experiments with Truth*, and for him, God is *satyam*, the absolute truth. So, by observing how he conducts his experiments, which he will admit with great candor are not always successful, we can learn how to deepen our meditation, intensify our sadhana, and improve the quality of life for all those around us.

On the one hand, he started as a very average person, and he took nearly twenty years to remake himself in the highest image of the [Gita](#), during his stay in South Africa. Secondly, he was a very practical person, and he will go to the extent of saying: Any spiritual contribution of mine, if it is not practical it's not worth following. Third (which appealed very much to me in the early days) he will tell us how many mistakes he has committed. He will refer to some of what he calls his Himalayan blunders, and he will also reassure us that they need not be a burden on our shoulders, and he will tell us how.

I am going to point out similarities whenever possible, not to make any comparisons at all between Mahatma Gandhi and myself, even though both of us are really children of the Gita. He is the [Mahatma](#), great soul. I am the [Hinatma](#), the little soul. He works on a gigantic canvas, the whole world is his stage; for me, [Tomales](#). So let's try to remember this all the time. I have been asked by many friends to try to illustrate the statements of [Gandhiji](#) from my own personal experience. You will find it much easier to identify with my life and my attempts at self-realization than that of a great spiritual giant like Mahatma Gandhi .

These are all quotations directly from his writings. "I must be taken with all my faults." When Jesus asks us, "[Be ye perfect as your father in heaven is perfect.](#)" he's asking us to try our level best. I don't think any human being can achieve complete perfection, which is only given to divine incarnations. But here I can illustrate very much from my life how, for the last forty years, every day I have tried to improve my life just a little – every day. That is the secret that you will see in Gandhiji all the time.

For example, even those of us who are functioning well, doing well in our sadhana, we can add a little more to our patience, take a little less from finding faults with others, criticizing others, pointing a finger of scorn at others. It's something everyone can do every day: at home, at work, on the playing field, in the theater. Everywhere there is opportunity. Similarly, I think there is

nobody who cannot deepen their meditation just a little more every day—spatially, one millimeter.

You can memorize new inspirational passages. I hope to translate a few more of them. You can make yourself a little more alert, because I still see sleeping problems every day whenever I come. We are not often aware when we sleep. We are not often aware when our inspirational passage becomes very vague as we get drowsy. This is something everyone can work at.

Similarly, in the evening for meditation – in order to have a good meditation in the morning, falling asleep in the mantram at night is a great help. That’s what I have been doing all these years. When you get to bed, do some inspirational reading, and close your eyes after finishing your inspirational reading and repeat your mantram so that you fall asleep in it. That puts you into the mood for meditation in the morning. I need hardly say, the way you spend your time, the way you are kind to others, the way you concentrate on your work, and the way that you remind yourself what the goal of life is, all these play a part in improving meditation. So when Gandhi says “I must be taken with all my faults,” he is reminding us that we are all full of faults. There is no need to get discouraged. We try to get over one . . . two . . . three, gradually so that our meditation will deepen, our relationships will deepen, and our awareness of God will deepen in the long run.

“I must be taken with all my faults. I am a searcher after truth.” God is called satyam, absolute truth, shivam, absolute joy, absolute goodness, sundaram, absolute beauty. So every scientist is seeking God. Every artist is seeking God. Every human being is seeking God. Gandhiji therefore says I am just a searcher. I am a seeker.

“My experiments I hold to be infinitely more important than the best equipped Himalayan expedition.” This is the refreshing contrast you will find in Gandhiji. So far he has been humble like the dust. Now he will say even the expedition in outer space, the voyage to the moon, the superpower project to go to Mars – all this is not as important as your sadhana, as everybody’s sadhana. Because when you improve your life you are helping your family, you are helping your community, you are helping your country.

“It has been my misfortune, or good fortune, to take the world by surprise. New experiments, or old experiments in new style must sometimes engender misunderstanding.” When I started talking about meditation thirty years ago, I think the word was unknown in every place I spoke. Secondly, I don’t think anybody connected meditation with practical benefits. Third, everybody thought it could be learned overnight or during a weekend seminar. So I can apply the same phrase. It has been my misfortune or good fortune to take this country by surprise.

“New experiments, or old experiments in new style, must sometimes engender misunderstanding.” Because I come from the third world, there were a lot of people who thought I was interested in money, and everybody gave me advice from that perspective because

everybody has a great skill that can be turned into money, so everybody said, “You have a valuable skill. Sell it! Ask for the highest bidder, fix the highest price.” Nobody could take me seriously when I said, “No, I am not going to charge anything; I am not going to ask for anything.” I don’t think anybody even took me seriously.

Then there was one important person in Berkeley, who was kind enough to say that he could listen to me while he was having lunch. So I accepted the invitation and he asked me while having lunch how long it would take for me to teach him how to meditate. No, first he said, “How do I know that all these benefits will come from meditation?” He was plainly skeptical, and I didn’t blame him for it, so, “Can you prove it?” I said, “Yes.” “How?” “By teaching you how to meditate so that you can see for yourself what the benefits are.” Then he said, “How long will it take?” I said, “Twelve years.” Which was the traditional estimate given in India, you know. I don’t think his lunch could have agreed with him at all that day. He really got upset. And as [John Bunyan](#) says in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, I saw him no more.

There was another place in the city, where I was invited to present meditation by a very enterprising woman who was in charge of a bookstore, and she introduced me to the audience and suddenly she said, “My cat has disappeared.” She left me and the meeting and went in search of her cat. This was the kind of atmosphere in which I had to present meditation. So as Gandhiji says, “It has been my misfortune or good fortune to take the world by surprise. New experiments or old experiments in new style must sometimes engender misunderstanding.”

“I have made the frankest admission of my many sins.” This is the great thing about Gandhiji. He will tell you over and over again how many mistakes he has made, how many blunders he has committed, and yet he will say, I have become aware of God, I have attained self-realization (without coming out, he will imply that). So none of us need feel disheartened if we have committed mistakes, or if we still commit mistakes, but we should try to stop committing mistakes by trying every day to be more vigilant, not to commit.

“I have made the frankest admission of my many sins, but I do not carry their burden on my shoulders.” I have made probably more mistakes than Gandhiji has done. For one thing, he was not living in the part of the century where it was easy to commit mistakes. In the modern world it is so easy to commit mistakes, particularly for young people who are out in the world, I find it so easy to understand why they fall victims to drugs, to sexual difficulties, to other forms of unhealthy behavior.

“. . . But I do not carry their burden on my shoulders.” And he comes out with the reason. “If I am journeying Godward, as I feel I am, it is safe with me.” That’s the answer. I can add my little testimony. If you try to give your best in your meditation, repeat your mantram whenever you can, put those around you first, be kind to everybody under all circumstances, and spend your leisure hours in some form of selfless service here, I can assure you these mistakes will not weigh

heavily on your shoulders. Otherwise, they are going to weigh heavily, as Gandhiji will come out and say over and over again.

“If I am journeying Godward, as I feel I am, it is safe with me, for I feel the warmth of the sunshine of his presence.” Guilt is like a cold wind that is blowing. When Shakespeare says, “Blow, blow, bitter wind,” it is the sense of guilt that oppresses most people who have committed mistakes. One of the most glorious names for Krishna is *Kshamasagara*. *Sagara* – ocean; *Kshama*—mercy, forgiveness. I have been telling my friends when they have been asking me, “Is your God just?” “No,” I said, “my God is not just. My God is merciful.” I have also been reminding people both at the church and here, that if we all had our desserts, if we all had what we deserved, there is no earthly chance for anybody in life.

It is because God is merciful that we have songs in our Indian tradition, “Let me drown myself in the sea of mercy.” One of the simplest ways to drown in the sea of mercy that God is, is to [“forgive us as we forgive those who trespass against us.”](#) I think Jesus really hit the mark when he said those who forgive other people easily will forgive themselves very easily. Those who lack forgiveness for others will find it hard to forgive themselves. So my advice always is to follow the words of Jesus, and whatever others have done, forgive them easily, don’t hold those things against them, move closer to them, and you will find you will be able to forgive yourself very easily. That’s how you begin to drown in the sea of mercy that God is.

Now here is a splendid statement. “My austerities, fastings, and prayers are, I know, of no value if I rely upon them for reforming me. But they have an inestimable value if they represent, as I hope they do, the yearnings of a soul striving to lay his weary head on the lap of his maker.” The whole world is fascinated by Gandhiji’s [satyagraha](#), and the whole world is aware of his nonviolent political campaigns, of his economic revolution that he brought about in India, but he is going to say now, these are not the most valuable part of me. What is the real Gandhi, what is most important for all is, he will say, his devotion to God, his desire to realize God, and his ceaseless endeavor to move closer to the goal.

We should have all these etched on our heart as they are on mine. “Whenever I see an erring man, I say to myself, I have also erred.” Few people are able to do this. If they are able to do this, they will not point a finger of criticism. They will not say unkind words. “Whenever I see an erring man” (this is one of the great spiritual giants speaking), “I say to myself, I have also erred.” That’s why you never hear me using words of deprecation about others.

“Wherever I see a lustful man, I say to myself, so was I once.” This is greatness. “And in this way, I feel kinship with everyone in the world, and I feel that I cannot be happy without the humblest of us being happy.” The truly spiritual person will be completely happy only when everybody around him or her is completely happy. He will strive all the time to do that. “I shall have to answer my God and my maker if I give anyone less than his due. But I am sure that he will bless me if he knows that I gave someone more than his due.” Which is what I try to practice every

day. These are not easy practices. This is how you grow in your stature until your head can reach the stars while your feet stand firmly on mother earth.

“I can truthfully say that I am slow to see the blemishes of fellow beings.” It’s a tragic truth that that’s what everybody is conditioned to see, immediately to see defects in others, to criticize them, to attack them, to denounce them. And Gandhiji says, “I can truthfully say . . .” he has trained his mind always to look at the bright side of people. Whenever I meet people, even though I know their blemishes I always keep my eyes on what is bright, and they respond to that emphasis on the bright side of their nature.

“The world knows so little of how much my so-called greatness depends upon the incessant toil and drudgery of silent, devoted, able, and pure workers, men as well as women. . . . I count no sacrifice too great for the sake of seeing God face to face.” Let me admit that is my sole ambition. That is my supreme goal, “and I count no sacrifice too great for the sake of seeing God face to face. The whole of my activity, whether it may be called social, political, humanitarian, or ethical, is directed to that end.” All our publication efforts, all our projects, all our spiritual disciplines, they are all for that simple, supreme goal.

“I claim to be no more than an average man, with less than average ability. Nor can I claim any special merit for such nonviolence or continence as I have been able to reach with laborious research.”

This is what thrilled me when I first read it: “I have not the shadow of a doubt that any man or woman can achieve what I have if he or she would make the same effort and cultivate the same hope and faith.”

He confesses, to encourage all of us, “I know the path. It is straight and narrow. It is like the edge of a sword. I rejoice to walk on it. I weep when I slip. God’s word is, he who strives never perishes. I have implicit faith in that promise” – because he has verified it over and over again.

“I am in the world, feeling my way to light amid the encircling gloom. I often err, and miscalculate. My trust is solely in God, and I trust men and women only because I trust God, who is in their hearts. If I had no God to rely upon I would be like [Timon](#), a hater of my species.”

He concludes, “I am a man of faith.” Not just prayer, unshakable faith. “My reliance is solely on God. One step is enough for me. The next step he will make clear to me when the time for it comes. I am but a poor, struggling soul, yearning to be wholly good, wholly truthful, and wholly nonviolent in thought, word, and deed, but ever failing to reach the ideal which I know to be true. I admit it’s a very painful climb, but the pain of it is a positive pleasure for me. Each step upward makes me feel stronger and fit for the next.

“It is true that I have often been let down.” See, nobody can escape, even if you are a Mahatma or if you are a Buddha or a Jesus. “It is true that I have often been let down. Many have deceived me

and many have been found wanting, but I do not repent of my association with them.” I have goodwill for them. “. . . For I know how to non-cooperate as I know how to cooperate. The most practical way of going on in the world is to take people at their word when you have no positive reason to the contrary.” To trust people, to accept people are good. For every one that may let you down, nine out of ten will fulfill your trust.

“My work will be finished if I succeed in carrying conviction to the human family that every man or woman, however weak in body, is the guardian of his or her self-respect and liberty. This defense avails though the whole world may be against the individual resistor.” That’s the glory of the individual, and that’s the glory of Gandhi’s life.

Terms and References

Bhagavad Gita “The Lord’s Song.” A spiritual dialogue between Arjuna, representing the human soul, and Krishna, the supreme Self.

Bunyan, John (1628-1688) English author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, a classic Christian text.

Gandhi(ji), Mahatma (1869-1948) Led India to freedom through a thirty-year struggle based completely on nonviolence.

Mahatma/Hinatma *maha* great, *hina*, small, *atma* soul or Self.

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

satyagraha [*satya* ‘truth’; *agraha* ‘grasping’] Gandhi’s term for a nonviolent campaign.

Timon (3rd cent. BCE) Athenian philosopher.

Tomales Town in California where Eknath Easwaran lived.

Quotations

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”
From the Sermon on the Mount, the Gospel of Saint Matthew

“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”
From the Lord’s Prayer, The Gospel of Saint Matthew.

To Love Is to Know Is to Act

Introduction

In this talk Easwaran continues to draw upon the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi, this time as an exemplar of true devotion, or *bhakti*. Bhakti is far more than sentimental emotion. It is a vibrant state of health and effectiveness in which action, knowledge, and love are fused into a force that leads to great selfless achievements.

To develop such devotion requires a growing capacity to get absorbed in meditation, or contemplative prayer as it is called in some traditions. Here Easwaran illustrates this process of growing absorption and its marvelous effect on daily life with quotations from several great mystics East and West.

They promise that if we meditate sincerely and systematically – “with all our might” – we can come to the stage of full absorption in meditation, in which all distractions and selfish desires subside and we become beacons of wisdom, love, and effective action on behalf of the world.

Practical Exercise

In this exercise we will continue to practice “trying our level best” as we did in the first exercise, but this time we will apply it to the quality which Easwaran lauds in this talk: cheerfulness. ([Click here to read the excerpt.](#))

During the coming week or two, look for a situation in which your cheerfulness evaporates. In that situation (or at least soon afterwards!) resuscitate your cheerfulness. Redefine the situation as an opportunity for cheerfulness. Here are a few methods you might try:

- Concentrate more fully on what you’re doing or listening to right now. Very often, we lose our cheerfulness by brooding over something that happened in the past. By bringing your one-pointed attention to the present you can step out of the past.
- Focus on the needs of others. Remind yourself how pleasant it is to be with cheerful people, and be cheerful for the sake of others.
- Act cheerfully, no matter how you feel. This is a very powerful strategy, through which we can discover that we don’t have to wait for a cheerful state of mind to arise. We can simply will ourselves to be cheerful.

Once again, in this exercise you are likely to meet with “failure,” times when you can’t regain your cheerfulness. Don’t let that get you down. Simply keep trying to stoke the fire of cheerfulness. With practice, you may catch a glimpse of the marvelous mental dynamic which Easwaran is pointing out: our cheerfulness (and our state of mind in general) need not depend on external circumstances at all. Our happiness is in our own hands.

Recommended Reading

Chapter Four, “Gandhi the Man” in *Gandhi the Man*.

Suggested Passage for Meditation

Invocations, by *Ansari of Heart*.

To Love Is to Know Is to Act

July 22, 1989

Transcript

I have been asked a number of practical questions about what [bhakti](#), or devotion to God, means in daily living. There is a widespread impression that devotion is a kind of maudlin sentimentality, to which one yields very easily. But the [Bhagavad Gita](#) throws a flood of light on how the man or woman whose heart is full of devotion to God will be ever active, ever toiling and moiling to help in solving the problems in whatever field they may arise.

The extraordinary thing about Mahatma Gandhi is that there is no field in which he did not make a contribution. In politics, in economics, in education, in health care, everywhere he was able to make a permanent contribution because that is how devotion to God expresses itself in the life of a human being.

Having been brought up very much in the Gandhian tradition, I cannot imagine even the spiritual life in which one lives in an ivory tower. So I am going to illustrate my exposition of [bhakti](#) from our own activities here, and also from my small personal [sadhana](#).

The Sanskrit word bhakti implies to love is to know is to act. The Bhagavad Gita can be aptly divided: the first six chapters dealing with the nature of selfless action; the following six chapters with the nature of wisdom [jnana](#), and the last, the apotheosis, the nature of love, universal love.

So I am going to draw upon, as I usually do, the personal testimony of the mystics from all the great religions, to show how they reached this supreme state, and the part played by meditation in removing all the obstacles to this supreme love, which is what we are all seeking.

When the great lovers of God testify unanimously that they have experimented with life in abundant measure—like [St. Augustine](#)—what they are trying to tell us is that we too are seeking the same universal love, the same creativity for selfless service, and the same wisdom, to know how to bring about the desired end, with right means taking us to the right end.

Let me take [Angelus Silesius](#), one of my favorite German mystics. “Man (which includes woman), if thou wishest to know what it is to pray sincerely, enter into thyself and interrogate the spirit of God.”

When, through selfless service, and through the practice of meditation (both of which help each other) we have achieved wisdom, it means that we have become aware of the unity of all

creatures. As you can see in my life, it is so self-evident that all nations are dear to me, all races are dear to me, all people are dear to me, all beasts and birds are dear to me.

The [Gita](#) says [brahmabhutah prasannatma na shochati na kankshati samah sarveshu bhuteshu madbhaktim labhate param](#). In the Gita Krishna promises such people, who work tirelessly for the welfare of all, without expecting anything in return, and who meditate regularly, systematically, sincerely, and with sustained enthusiasm, that they will leave all their distractions behind. They will become totally absorbed.

One of the great promises in the Gita, which has supported me during very difficult days in sadhana, and I want you to know that I have had very, very difficult days in sadhana, too, difficult months and difficult years, too. It says, which has comforted me, consoled me, and inspired me, [ananyachetah satatam yo mam smarati nityashah tasyaham sulabhah partha nityayuktasya yoginah](#). You really need to know Sanskrit to see the beauty of this. *Ananyachetah*—when there are no distractions. If there are no selfish desires there will be no distractions, and when there are no distractions, there is total absorption. Your senses close down, your mind slows down, and Krishna says, to such people, *aham sulabha partha*. He says, such people can reach me easily. Such people can obtain my grace easily.

That is why I would ask everybody to give as much of your time and of your resources and of your skills and your energies, to carry on this work, which is expanding on all sides now, which is needed by millions of people, because it'll help not only millions of people, it'll help your own sadhana, by deepening your meditation, by providing you with all the motivation to deepen your meditation, and then bring you at last to bhakti. Bhakti means here not only love of people, but love of what we are pleased to call nature. If you want to see a man of God or a woman of God, observe their attitudes towards everybody. See their attitudes towards animals and birds. See their attitudes towards nature.

So the third section of the Gita says finally you will reach the supreme state of love, where all nature reflects God, all your activities reflect God, and every action of yours, in buying and selling, everything shows that you are aware of the divinity of what we call the environment.

That is why Angelus Silesius says, “If thou wishest to know what it is to pray sincerely, enter into thyself and interrogate the spirit of God,” who will answer all your questions.

And one of our favorites here, [Mechthild of Magdeburg](#): “That prayer has great power which a person makes with all his might.” Most people who pray say, “Our prayers are not answered.” That's because you have to pray with all your might, which in practical language means there must be no distractions. There must be no other echoes in the mind. There must be no other demands. All your longing, all your love, goes into this fathomless prayer, which is always answered from within, if it is selfless. The interesting thing is, if it is not selfless, you can't get there. You can only knock on the door, and somebody will chase you out.

So let us comment on this one by one. “That prayer has great power which a person makes with all his might. It makes a sour heart sweet.” In our modern world there are a lot of sour-faced people. The kind of advice they get (it is on the other side of my pad). See how we have reversed everything. It says, “Your facial expression dictates your thinking.” Say cheese, and you become happy. Say phew, and you become unhappy. This is a serious theory, for which they have received a great grant, which our folks are not able to obtain at all. It has all become reversed.

I think it was [Meher Baba](#), whom I had the honor of meeting in my junior college, who used to signal, in sign language: Love of God makes you cheerful under all circumstances. The Gita says [Brahmabhutah](#)—who is aware of God; [prasannatma](#) – no disaster can depress them. No blow aimed at them can put them down. It is not that they won’t get hurt. It is not that they won’t be wounded, but they will be like the [dharma doll](#), named after the Buddha and made in Japan. You put it down, it’ll jump up! In fact, when I first read about it I went and looked at the dharma doll; I tried to put it down. Every time I would put it down it would jump up. That is the nature of the man or woman of God. The more you subject them to pressure, the more graceful they will be. It’s very easy to be very graceful when there is no pressure, but the test of devotion to God is when you are subject to immense pressure – unkind attacks, unjust reports. To be able to be cheerful, to maintain your concentration, to continue your work, to have loving relationships – that is the proof of devotion to God.

She puts it very well. “It makes a sour heart sweet, a sad heart merry.” That’s what a good meditation can do. You go moaning and groaning in. You come laughing out—not physically, but mentally. This has been the testimony of many of the great mystics, both in the West and the East, whatever burden is put on them, give them an hour of meditation and they will come out of it free.

“ . . . a poor heart rich . . . ” A poor heart means an ungenerous heart. I want everything for myself. I don’t want to share with anybody. When such people learn to meditate, they will want to share, share all that they have, so that they can now become truly rich.

“ . . . a timid heart brave, a sick heart well . . . ” That doesn’t refer only to the mind, but even physical sickness, because the mind plays such an important part in bringing it on. There are physical ailments too, but I am prepared to maintain that in many forms of serious illness, while there is a strong physical agent, there is also a strong mental agent, and when that mental aspect is set right, and if we take all the measures recommended by our physician on the physical aspects, too, I don’t see any conflict between the body and the mind cooperating to make us well.

“ . . . a blind heart full of sight . . . ” She is talking from personal observation. People who are insensitive are blind, and with all our emphasis on go after number one, feather your own nest, look after your own private satisfactions to the exclusion of anything else, people have become blind. Such people, when they learn to meditate, they will begin to see the needs of others, of

their partner, or their children, or their friends, and even of their enemies. That is the blind coming to see.

“... a cold heart ardent ...” Passion is not always a bad word. I have a lot of passion in me, but the passion has been harnessed. Passion is power; passion is enormous power. What we learn to do through the practice of meditation is to harness that power, so that it will lead to the relief of distress all around us: human beings, animals, and nature herself.

“... a cold heart ...” not warm, but “... a cold heart ardent ...” It’s a beautiful term.

And look at the conclusion. This is Mechthild of Magdeburg quoting her personal experience. “It draws down the great God into the little heart.” He cannot resist. It draws him down. Such is the power of this immense love. “It drives the hungry soul with the fullness of God, and it brings together two lovers.” Now it is not God and man or God and woman, two lovers, two passionate lovers. “In a wondrous place where they speak much of love.” This is the kind of love that all of us are seeking, and this is the kind of love that is possible for all of us, living with our family, working with our people, and never forgetting that this is what we are looking for.

Claudia, this is one of my literary lapses. From [Robert Herrick](#):

Lord, I am like the mistletoe,
Which has no root and cannot grow
Or prosper but by that same tree
It clings about. So I by thee.

The lover of God says, I have lost my roots, pulled them all out. I have extinguished my ego. It is dead. And I am now like a mistletoe twining round the divine tree. I don’t have to worry now about rain, about compost. Gale spends half her time in the garden preparing all this. The lover of God says, I don’t need all that now, because I don’t have any other support except God.

This is another well-known Western saint, [Richard of St. Victor](#). “Indeed, many things which we shall not be able to discover, either by the experiment of work” (even work done in great research labs) “or by the investigation of reason, we shall deserve to be taught by importunate prayer, by the revelation of divine inspiration.” That’s what happens in deep meditation, what cannot be discovered through intellectual work, through great work done in great labs. Now you can get the answers right in the depths of your consciousness, if you have love of God, which manifests itself in wanting to make a contribution to life around you.

This is again [Angelus Silesius](#). “God is neither high nor low.” People in all countries, both in this country and in India, when they refer to God they always say that [pointing upwards]. Actually one of the Hindi words for God is Upawallah. Upa means upper, wallah means who is there. He

is not only up there (like ozone), he's down here too. So we have got all kinds of wrong ideas about the existence or the presence of God.

“God is neither high nor low,” and Angelus Silesius says, “and who speaks otherwise is badly informed on the subject.” That must be great in German. “God is neither here nor there. Whoever desires to find him, let him chain his hands and feet, body and mind.” I would add, in meditation. This is what happens in profound meditation. As your mind begins to slow down, as the thinking process slowly winds, runs down, as distractions disappear, slowly, along with your mind becoming still, your body will become still.

[Rumi](#) has a great line where he says, If you want to know who is meditating well, watch a bird perched on the crown of his head. If he moves, he is not meditating. If he is still, the bird will slowly lie down and go to sleep. He is in an excellent state of spiritual growth.

Here is [Eckhart](#) again, giving us the simple secret. I really wish I knew a little bit of German. “Where the creature stops, there God begins. All God wants is for thee to go out of thyself in respect of the creature, and let God be God in thee.” That’s why Gandhi says he wants to make himself zero. It is this creature who should go out that we cling to. We say, settle down here, we will give you permanent residence here. We should try to persuade him, as they say in [Tomales](#), to relocate himself as soon as possible.

Great poetry and great devotion from [Ansari of Herat](#). “O Lord, prayer at thy gate is a mere formality. Thou knowest what thy slave desires.” A verse like that can plunge me deep. Ansari says, I am your slave. I have given you all my love, all my life, and I don’t have to tell you what I want. I want you. That’s Ansari. And he says the Lord responds to that kind of drastic demand, where we put everything we have before him and say, Now I want you. “Lord, prayer at thy gate is a mere formality.” Why should I pray? “Thou knowest what thy slave desires.”

The [Sufis](#) again. They always have a touch of great poetry. Many people like to meditate in a garden. Even in India you will often hear sages saying that I want to meditate, went to meditate in this garden, or I went to meditate in that garden. [Ali](#) says, Oh yes there is a great garden in which you can meditate—silence of the mind. Then your mind becomes a garden. It is these thoughts that are weeds there. Pull them out, make the garden silent, and in that stillness you will see the Lord of Love.

[Brother Lawrence](#). In the press, in the office, in the kitchen, in the garden, the school, everywhere we can have these words. “We must do our business faithfully, without trouble or disquiet, recalling our mind to God mildly.” That’s very good advice, you see. “And with tranquility, as often as we find it wandering from him.” Wherever we are working, we should always remind ourselves that this is work in the service of the Lord, therefore no quarrels, no disharmonies, no deprecation, no attempt to do a job that’s not well done.

Doesn't Brother Lawrence say, In the kitchen I am as much aware of God as I am in the chapel? In the printshop, in the bindery, in the school, in the garden, everywhere we should be aware of God in this manner. It'll help our meditation, and our meditation will help this.

And Angelus Silesius, again, dropping a great flare on [samadhi](#). When they talk about prayer, they are talking about interior prayer. When they talk about contemplation, when they are talking about meditation – interior prayer, contemplation, meditation, are all similar terms used in different contexts. “The most noble of prayers is when he who prays is transformed inwardly into that before which he kneels.” It's a terrifying concept – that when you are watching somebody who is deeply absorbed in meditation, you are not watching just a frail human being. You are watching a person who is deeply connected with the supreme source of life. That's why when I saw Gandhiji meditating for the first time I got frightened, which is a very healthy response. Even for us ordinary people, there can be times when we will go deep in meditation, then even to look at us is uplifting and enlightening.

Terms and References

Ali Sufi of the 10th century.

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

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

Baba, Meher (1894-1969) Indian mystic whose belief that all had been said was given emphasis by his observing silence for forty-four years.

bhakti Sanskrit term for devotion, worship, love.

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 Krishna, the supreme Self.

dharmadoll (or darumadoll) [*dharmadoll* ‘the universal law which holds all life together in unity’]
Doll made in Japan, which has a rounded, weighted bottom so that it always returns to an upright position.

Eckhart, Meister (c.1260-1327) Regarded by many as the father of German mysticism.

Herrick, Robert (1591-1633) English poet.

jnana The path of wisdom

Lawrence, Brother (c. 1605-1691) Lay brother among the Carmelites in France.

Magdeburg, Mechthild of (c. 1212-1282) Catholic German mystic.

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

samadhi Union with the Lord; a state of intense concentration in which consciousness is completely unified.

sadhana A body of disciplines or way of life which lead to Self-realization.

Silesius, Angelus (1624-1677) German mystic and poet.

Sufi An Islamic mystic.

Tomales Town in California where Eknath Easwaran lived

Victor, Richard of Saint 12th century Scottish monk and mystic.

Quotations

Brahmabhutah ... Bhagavad Gita, chapter 18, verse 54: United with the Lord, ever joyful, beyond the reach of self-will and sorrow, he serves Me in every living creature and attains supreme devotion to Me.

brahmabhutah prasannatma na shochati na kankshati samah sarveshu bhuteshu madbhaktim labhate param

brahmabhutah = a God-absorbed one *brahma* - God; *bhutah*, being;

prasannaatmaa = content within himself *prasanna* – satisfied, content; *aatmaa* - Self;

na shochati = he does not sorrow *na* - not; *shochati* - he or she sorrows;

na kankshati = he does not desire *na* - not; *kankshati* - he or she desires;

samah sarveshu bhuteshu = (he or she is) impartial among all beings *samah* - same; *sarveshu* – in or among all; *bhuteshu* - in beings;

madbhaktim labhate paraam = he or she attains the highest devotion to Me *mad-bhaktim* - Me-devotion; *labhate* - he or she attains; *paraam* – highest;

Ananyachetah ... Bhagavad Gita, chapter 8, verse 14: I am easily attained by the person who always remembers Me and is attached to nothing else. Such a person is a true yogi, Arjuna.
ananyachetah satatam yo mam smarati nityashah tasyaham sulabhah partha nityayuktasya yoginah.

ananyachetah = one whose mind (dwells on) no other an - no; *anya* - no other; *chetah* - the mind

satatam = always

yo mam smarati nityashah = he or she who remembers me constantly yo - he or she who; mam - Me; smarati; remembers; nityashah – constantly

tasyaham sulabhah paartha = of/for such a one I am easily obtained, Arjuna tasya - of him or her; aham - I; sulabhah - easy to obtain; partha - O Arjuna!

nityayuktasya yoginah = of/for the ever-united one, of/for the yogi nitya - ever; yuktasya - of/for the united one; yoginah - of/for the yogi

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: Last month, in Lesson Plan #16, we explored the interaction between meditation and daily living. This time we are continuing that focus on meditation, with a special emphasis on effort. We will be asking in particular, how can we be “perfect in effort” even when we feel far from perfect in our practice? In this week’s videotaped talk, Easwaran quotes Gandhi as saying, “I must be taken with all my faults.” Then he goes on to explain: “When Jesus asks us, ‘Be ye perfect as your father in heaven is perfect,’ he’s asking us to try our level best. I don’t think any human being can achieve complete perfection, which is only given to divine incarnations. But here I can illustrate very much from my life how, for the last forty years, every day I have tried to improve my life just a little – every day.... Similarly, I think there is nobody who cannot deepen their meditation just a little more every day – spatially, one millimeter.”

Discussion Question: If you were to try to deepen your meditation a little bit (just one millimeter) every day during the coming week, what would you do? Try to be very realistic and conservative – don’t try for more than you are capable of, but do plan for an improvement every day. Here are some suggestions to start with, drawn from the talk.

- Start memorizing a new inspirational passage, aiming to learn one stanza by the end of the week.

- Be more alert in meditation and fight sleep more assiduously, especially when the passage begins to get “vague.”
- Be sure to do some inspirational reading before you go to bed, and try to fall asleep in the mantram. “That puts you in the mood for meditation in the morning.”
- Pay special attention to the way you spend your time: “The way you are kind to others, the way you concentrate on your work, and the way that you remind yourself what the goal of life is, all these play a part in improving meditation.”

When it’s time for inspiration, watch the first talk on this tape, “Gandhi, Man of God,” which is 32 minutes long. For those not using the videotapes, begin reading Chapter 3 of *Gandhi the Man*, “Mother and Child.” Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

Lesson Two

Introduction: Our theme this month is effort – how can we become perfect in effort even when we feel far from perfect in our practice? Last week we reflected on what efforts we might make every single day to deepen our meditation just a little bit. Let’s take just a few minutes to discuss how that went.

After about 5 minutes, go on to this week’s discussion question: In the reading we’ll do today, from *Gandhi the Man*, detachment is a central theme. Easwaran writes that the person “who is detached from results and tries only to do his best without thought of profit or power or prestige does not waver when difficulties come. He sees his way clearly through every trial, for his eyes are always on the goal.” How does that ideal of detachment apply to our efforts in practicing the Eight Point Program? Is it possible to see our own “failures” simply as difficulties, which do not make us waver in our efforts? How might we keep our eyes on the goal, even at the times when we are not feeling enthusiastic?

When it’s time for inspiration, read from Chapter 3 of *Gandhi the Man*, “Mother and Child.” Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

Lesson Three

Introduction: This week we are continuing with our theme: How can we become perfect in effort even when we feel far from perfect in our practice? In the first video talk, Easwaran defined

perfection in meditation as “trying our level best.” This week we will try to apply that attitude to the quality that Easwaran lauds in this week’s talk: Cheerfulness. Easwaran refers to what’s known in Japan as the daruma (or dharma) doll – a doll with a round, weighted bottom, which returns automatically to its upright position. He says, “You put it down, it’ll jump up! In fact, when I first read about it I went and looked at the dharma doll; I tried to put it down. Every time I would put it down it would jump up. That is the nature of the man or woman of God. The more you subject them to pressure, the more graceful they will be. It’s very easy to be very graceful when there is no pressure, but the test of devotion to God is when you are subject to immense pressure – unkind attacks, unjust reports. To be able to be cheerful, to maintain your concentration, to continue your work, to have loving relationships – that is the proof of devotion to God.”

Discussion Question Cheerfulness doesn’t always come easily. In which situations does your cheerfulness evaporate? How might you redefine that situation as an opportunity for cheerfulness? Here are a few methods you might try:

- Concentrate more fully on what you’re doing or listening to right now. Very often, we lose our cheerfulness by brooding over something that happened in the past. By bringing your one-pointed attention to the present you can step out of the past.
- Focus on the needs of others. Remind yourself how pleasant it is to be with cheerful people, and be cheerful for the sake of others.
- Act cheerfully, no matter how you feel. This is a very powerful strategy, through which we can discover that we don’t have to wait for a cheerful state of mind to arise. We can simply will ourselves to be cheerful.

When it’s time for inspiration, watch the second of the talks on this tape, “To Love Is to Know is to Act,” which is 30 minutes. For groups not using the videos, please read from Chapter 4 of Gandhi the Man.

Lesson Four

Introduction: This week we are concluding our exploration of the topics of effort and perfection. We will continue with last week's topic – maintaining cheerfulness under all circumstances.

Discussion Question: Last week we talked about those times when our cheerfulness evaporates and we thought about how to redefine those occasions as times for opportunities for being cheerful. In such occasions, we are likely to fail. How can we maintain our efforts even at that point? Very often, such situations demand more willpower than we seem to have. How can we use the Eight Points to build the will in some other area of our life, which can then be applied to this situation? Have you experimented with that dynamic? What methods, using the Eight Points, have you used to summon up cheerfulness regardless of the situation you find yourself in?

When it's time for inspiration, read from Chapter 4 of Gandhi the Man. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

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: www.nilgiri.org/fellowship. 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

Blue Mountain Center of Meditation
Post Office Box 256
Tomales, CA, 94971
800 475 2369
www.nilgiri.org

©2004 by the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation