

The Talks of Eknath Easwaran : Tape 22

## *Short Study Guide for Meditation and the Mantram*

### *Instructions in Meditation from the Gita*

#### *Introduction*

This month's tape includes two talks in which Sri Easwaran reviews the core disciplines in his Eight Point Program: meditation and the repetition of a mantram. In our exercises we will use this occasion to examine our practice afresh and look for ways to sharpen our skills.

The first talk is a commentary on the sixth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, which contains Sri Krishna's instructions in meditation. Easwaran concentrates on two of the verses from which he drew the basic elements of his mode of meditation.

The practical and the lofty are always inseparable for Easwaran. As he focuses on the details of time, place, and posture, he also provides glimpses into the supreme purpose of meditation – to rise above ordinary consciousness and become aware of the divine ground of our existence:

“The sages of ancient India discovered thousands of years ago that in the very depths of our consciousness there is a divine spark that is infinite and immortal. It is in trying to discover this divinity at the core of our personality that the human being rises to the greatest heights physically, mentally, intellectually, and of course spiritually.”

#### *Practical Exercise*

After watching this talk, please review the various aspects of your daily meditation practice and find one which needs some work. Once you've identified the weakness, develop a simple, manageable strategy to remedy it. To help you, here is a checklist of the basic elements of Sri Easwaran's mode of meditation, along with some typical weaknesses and possible remedies.

***Meditation schedule:*** Are you consistent in the time of day when you meditate? Do you sit down for meditation soon after getting up in the morning, or do you get distracted by other pursuits? To remedy this, gently nudge your practice in the direction of a consistent morning time. Start meditating within 30 minutes of arising from sleep.

***Duration:*** Do you always meditate for a full 30 minutes? If not, try during the coming week to give it a greater effort. If you get restless or sleepy and are tempted to stop, stand up briefly or take a short walk repeating the mantram, then sit down and complete the 30 minutes. If necessary, you could set a timer for 30 minutes and resolve not to get up until the timer goes off.

**Posture:** Do you maintain an upright posture for the full period of meditation? If you have difficulties doing this, you might benefit from the section on the nilgiri.org Web site, entitled “Posture in Meditation.”

**Seating arrangement:** Do you find sleep or physical discomfort a persistent distraction? If so, experiment this week with a different seating arrangement. Use an extra pillow as lower back support to keep your spine erect. Do some gentle stretching before you begin. Take a few moments to find a comfortable, alert position at the outset, and check your posture once or twice as you meditate.

**Passage:** Is your repertoire of inspirational passages broad enough? Have your passages become so familiar that you repeat them mechanically? Set aside a full hour at some time during the week, go to a pleasant, quiet place, and memorize part or all of a new passage.

**Distractions:** Do you have specific repetitive distractions? Take five minutes outside of meditation (just a short period, no need to take more time) to reflect on the connection between these distractions and the way you think and act during the day. How might you use the allied disciplines to start diminishing this distracting force in your mind?

#### ***Suggested Passage for Meditation***

In addition to the work you do this week on the details of your meditation practice, choose a passage from *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* that describes the essence of meditation to you – your ideal. Read it frequently this week, and start memorizing it.

#### ***Recommended Reading***

*The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, Volume One, Chapter Six.

## ***A Remedy for Every Ill***

### ***Introduction***

Along with meditation, the repetition of a mantram or holy name forms the core of Sri Easwaran's Eight Point Program. In this talk, a mystical verse from the Sanskrit tradition gives him an opportunity to explore how broad and deep this practice can go. The mantram, as a link to our deepest Self, "is the best remedy for any sickness, a light in the darkness, a bridge across difficulties, a protector against fears, a friend amidst troubles, and a boat to carry us across the deep sea of phenomenal existence."

### ***Practical Exercise***

At the conclusion of this talk, Easwaran touches on the topic of using the mantram to deal with fear. This week we will explore this deep topic with a simple exercise.

Worry is a common form of fearfulness with which we are all acquainted, so it provides a good place to start dealing with fear. Reflect for a few moments to identify a situation in your life that makes you worried. Take a blank book or sheet of paper and write your concern in a few words at the top of the page. Then, fill up the page below it by writing your mantram. Feel free to repeat this exercise as often as you like. Try to do it at least once a day for a week. Its purpose is to train us to apply the mantram to situations about which we usually worry, and so gain the capacity to act with detached concern. Repeating the mantram is a way of learning not to dwell so much on our fears, or on ourselves, but to direct our attention to the deeper part of our personality which has the spiritual resources to deal with the problem.

### ***Suggested Passage for Meditation***

Choose a passage from *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* that relates to the mantram. Read it frequently this week, and start memorizing it.

### ***Recommended Reading***

Continue reading from *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, Volume One, Chapter Six.

## ***Weekly Lesson Plan***

### ***Lesson One***

This month our lessons will lead us through a review of the core disciplines in the Eight Point Program: meditation and the mantram.

The videotaped talk we'll watch this week is a commentary on these lines from the Bhagavad Gita. "Strive to still your thoughts. Make your mind one-pointed in the practice of meditation, and your heart will be purified. Hold your body, head, and neck firmly in a straight line, and keep your eyes from wandering."

For this week's lesson, we'll review some of the most important aspects of our daily meditation practice and reflect on how we might improve our practice in each area. Here is a checklist of the basic elements of Sri Easwaran's mode of meditation, along with some typical weaknesses and possible remedies. Read each one and reflect on what has helped you in the past to make progress in them, and what improvements you might make in the future.

***Meditation schedule:*** Are you consistent in the time of day when you meditate? Do you sit down for meditation soon after getting up in the morning, or do you get distracted by other pursuits? To remedy this, gently nudge your practice in the direction of a consistent morning time. Start meditating within 30 minutes of arising from sleep.

***Duration:*** Do you always meditate for a full 30 minutes? If not, try during the coming week to give it a greater effort. If you get restless or sleepy and are tempted to stop, stand up briefly or take a short walk repeating the mantram, then sit down and complete the 30 minutes. If necessary, you could set a timer for 30 minutes and resolve not to get up until the timer goes off.

***Posture:*** Do you maintain an upright posture for the full period of meditation? If you have difficulties doing this, you might benefit from the section on the nilgiri.org Web site, entitled "Posture in Meditation."

***Seating arrangement:*** Do you find sleep or physical discomfort a persistent distraction? If so, experiment this week with a different seating arrangement. Use an extra pillow as lower back support to keep your spine erect. Do some gentle stretching before you begin. Take a few moments to find a comfortable, alert position at the outset, and check your posture once or twice as you meditate.

When it's time for inspiration, watch the first talk on the tape, *Instructions in Meditation from the Gita*, which is 34 minutes long, or read from the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

## ***Lesson Two***

This week we are continuing our focus on meditation. As we did last week, we'll review some of the most important aspects of our daily meditation practice and reflect on how we might improve our practice in each area. Here are two of the basic elements of Sri Easwaran's mode of meditation, along some typical weaknesses that arise, and possible remedies. Read each one and reflect on what has helped you in the past to make progress in them, and what improvements you might make in the future.

***Passage:*** Is your repertoire of inspirational passages broad enough? Have your passages become so familiar that you repeat them mechanically? Set aside a full hour at some time during the week, go to a pleasant quiet place, and memorize part or all of a new passage. If the group desires, one Satsang meeting may be devoted to a quiet period for memorizing passages.

***Distractions:*** Do you have specific repetitive distractions? Take a few minutes (not during meditation!) to reflect on the connection between these distractions and the way you think and act during the day. How might you use the allied disciplines to start diminishing this distracting force in your mind? Don't dwell on the distractions themselves or spend too much time on this, but concentrate your attention on what would be beneficial.

When it's time for inspiration, read from Chapter 6 of *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

## ***Lesson Three***

This week our focus is the mantram, and we'll do a simple exercise to explore how the mantram can be used to reduce worry.

In the videotaped talk this week, a mystical verse from the Sanskrit tradition gives Easwaran an opportunity to explore how broad and deep the mantram can go. The mantram, as a link to our deepest Self, "is the best remedy for any sickness, a light in the darkness, a bridge across difficulties, a protector against fears, a friend amidst troubles, and a boat to carry us across the deep sea of phenomenal existence." At the conclusion of this talk, Easwaran touches on the topic of using the mantram to deal with fear.

Worry is a common form of fearfulness with which we are all acquainted, so it provides a good place to start dealing with fear. Reflect for a few moments to identify a situation in your life that makes you worried. Ask everyone in the group to write their concern at the top of a blank sheet. If anyone prefers, they can just use a few initials or some other cryptic way of writing down the worry. Then, in some way that's appropriate for the group, collect the sheets, shuffle them, and pass them out again so that everyone has someone else's sheet.

Don't ask or talk about the concerns listed on the sheets. Just write the mantram with as much concentration as possible. In this form, "mantram worrying" can teach us how to combine concern with

detachment. With practice we can start to relate to our own challenges with the same detachment we have about others' troubles. Repeating the mantram is a way of learning not to dwell so much on our fears, or on ourselves, but to direct our attention to the deeper, spiritual part of our personality, which has the spiritual resources to deal with the problem

If you are doing this exercise by yourself, take a blank book or a blank sheet of paper and write your concern in a few words at the top of the page. Then, fill up the page below it by writing your mantram. Feel free to repeat this exercise as often as you like. Try to do it at least once a day for a week. Its purpose is to train us to apply the mantram to situations about which we usually worry, and so gain the capacity to act with detached concern.

After completing the exercise take some time to reflect or discuss how you might use the mantram in a similar way with other difficult challenges, such as irritation or insecurity.

When it's time for inspiration, watch the second talk on this tape, *A Remedy for Every Ill*, which is 31 minutes long, or continue reading the sixth chapter of *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, Volume One. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

#### ***Lesson Four***

This week we'll be repeating the exercise we did last week. This time, however, when identifying an issue about which to write the mantram, choose whatever challenge is most pressing for you right now.

Once again, take some time to reflect on how you might apply this technique in other contexts, using a mantram walk or silent repetition as well as writing.

When it's time for inspiration, continue reading the sixth chapter of *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, Volume One. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

## ***Terms & References***

***ajapajapam*** The holy name (*mantram*) repeating itself in our consciousness without effort on our part.

***Atman*** The Self, the seed of perfection hidden within all creatures.

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

***Jung, Carl (1875-1961)*** Swiss psychiatrist, one of the founding fathers of modern depth psychology.

***Kabir*** Medieval Indian mystic and poet, who is said to have lived 120 years.

***Kerala*** The South Indian state where Sri Easwaran was born and raised.

***Patanjali*** Ancient Indian teacher of meditation. Author of the *Yoga Sutras*.

***Ramdas*** Swami Ramdas (1884-1963). Modern Indian mystic.

***Sufis*** Islamic mystics.

## ***Verses referred to in this talk:***

### ***From the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter Six:***

Verse 12

*tatraikagram manah kritva yatachittendriyakriyah upavishyasane yunjyad yogam atmavishuddhaye*

Having taken your seat, strive to still your thoughts. Make your mind one-pointed in the practice of meditation, and your heart will be purified.

Verse 10

*bhramany adhaya karmani sangam tyaktva karoti yah lipyate na sa papena padma patram ivambhasa*

Those who have surrendered all selfish attachments in work to the Lord are like the leaf of a lotus floating clean and dry in water. Sin cannot touch them.

Verse 26

*Yato yato nishcharati manashchanchalam asthiram tatastato niyamyaitad atmany eva vasham nayet*

It is the nature of the mind to be restless and diffuse, always seeking satisfaction without. Lead it within; train it to rest in the Self.

Verse 13

*samam kayashirogrivam dharayann achalam sthirah*

Hold your body, head, and neck firmly in a straight line.

Verse 27

*prashantamanasam hy enam yoginam sukham uttamam upaiti shanta rajasam brahma bhutam akalmasham*

Abiding joy comes to those who still the mind and senses, who free themselves from the taint of self-will and unify their consciousness in the Lord.

Verse 30

*Dehi nityam avadhyo 'yam dehe sarvasya bharata. Tasmāt sarvani bhutani na tvam shochitum arhasi.*

The Self of all beings, living within the body, is eternal and cannot be harmed. Therefore, you should not grieve.

The following is a traditional verse (not from the Gita):

*Rujasu nathah paramam hi bhashajam tamah pradipo vishameshu samkramah  
Bhayeshu raksha vyasaneshu bandhavo bhavaty agadhe vishayambhasi plavah.*

The Lord is the best remedy for any sickness, a light in the darkness, a bridge across difficulties, a protector against fears, a friend amidst troubles, and a boat to carry us across the deep sea of phenomenal existence.

*rujasu* – in sickness

*nathah* – the Lord

*paramam* – the highest, best

*hi* – indeed

*bhashajam* – remedy, drug

*tamah* – out of darkness

*pradipo* – a bright light, beacon

*vishameshu* – in difficulties

*samkramah* – a bridge, crossing



*bhayeshu* – in fears  
*raksha* – protection  
*vyasaneshu* – in pains, in troubles  
*bandhavo* – a friend  
*bhavaty* – He is  
*agadhe* – in the deep  
*vishayambhasi* – in the ocean of material phenomena  
*plavah* -- a boat

### ***How to Use This Course***

This video is part of an ongoing monthly series in the teachings of Sri Eknath Easwaran. The talks on this tape, like all of Sri 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 Sri Easwaran's book *Meditation*, which can be found on our Web site, [www.nilgiri.org](http://www.nilgiri.org). A brief list of those points can be found at the end 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 Sri 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 Sri Easwaran and Nilgiri Press, and a schedule of retreats based on the Eight Point Program, please contact

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