THE TALKS OF EKNATH EASWARAN

33

Patience and Beauty
The Climax of Spiritual Evolution

SHORT STUDY GUIDE

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This study guide is part of a self-study course called *The Dynamics of the Mind.* Each study guide includes four lessons designed either for a BMCM spiritual fellowship group session or for personal study. If you are using this course on your own, or if you would like to engage in further discussion about the lessons, you are welcome to participate in our e-mail discussion group based on this course. Please e-mail estudygroup@nilgiri.org for more information.

The DVD format offers several advantages that you may want to make use of in your study of these talks:

In order to enhance your comprehension of the talk, you can select the option of watching the talks with subtitles. After selecting "Play Talk" from the main menu, choose one of the options on the left-hand side of the screen.

If you prefer to watch the talks in shorter segments, you can watch one half at a time. Each DVD contains two 30-minute talks, each of which is split into two sections. After selecting "Play Talk" in the main menu, choose the section you would like to watch.

If your spiritual fellowship group wishes to watch 15 minutes of a talk per week, you can allot 45 minutes of your meeting to reading and discussion (along the lines suggested below), and watch one section of the DVD before

meditation. We recommend that you start meditating directly after watching the segment.

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

LESSON ONE

We have reached the ninth study guide in our *Dynamics of the Mind* series. Over the remaining four months of the course, we'll explore what Sri Easwaran calls "a vast, uncharted ocean" – the deeper regions of consciousness, where abundant stores of spiritual energy lie trapped, waiting to be harnessed and transformed through meditation.

The spiritual life is a long journey. As we swim successfully through the smaller challenges of daily life, we gradually become aware of other, larger obstacles looming ahead. Often we are only dimly aware of these persistent negative tendencies, though we sense how they limit our growth. It's uncomfortable to confront them, but as we grasp the tremendous opportunities they have concealed, we develop a growing confidence and zest for spiritual work.

In this week's reading, Easwaran introduces a helpful concept from the Buddha's teachings: *asavas,* or conditioned cravings that lock us out of deeper consciousness. Sense habits are often very hard to change and our goal here is not to change ourselves overnight, but to gain a perspective on the mental dynamics involved in craving. When you understand these dynamics, it's much easier to make changes.

Reading

Even after almost thirty years of teaching meditation, I still am amazed at how much more there is to say about it. Words simply cannot communicate some of the marvelous experiences which it is our birthright as human beings to look forward to as contemplation deepens. Until you yourself get into the submarine that is meditation and enter the dark waters of the mind, far below the glittering surface of consciousness, there is no way to fathom these experiences. But even those who meditate sincerely and systematically face serious obstacles which must be overcome before they can penetrate the recesses of this vast, uncharted ocean that is the mind.

The Buddha enumerates five such obstacles: sensuality, ill will, laziness, restlessness, and anxiety or fear. Each of these locks us out of deeper consciousness. Like an inner tube around a swimmer's waist, they keep us from diving below the surface of the mind by entangling us in the thoughts and experiences of the outside world. Let us look at these obstacles one by one.

1. Sensuality

"Sensuality," in the Buddha's language, is not a term of moral judgment. It refers simply to our human tendency to become entangled in the impressions of our

senses – to become so attached to what brings sensory pleasure or pain that we lose real freedom of choice. This is a normal biological response, but when we are trying to enter and master the world within, it keeps us oriented in just the wrong direction. To turn inward, we have to detach ourselves from the hold the senses have on the mind; there is no other way.

Unfortunately, our whole civilization seems involved in a conspiracy to stimulate the senses more and more. Every day, in the newspapers and magazines I look through, the films I see (or walk out on), I am amazed to what degree this tendency is exploited. Look at the pages of even those prestigious magazines which cater to educated, sophisticated men and women. Every ad is aimed at this singularly low level. The so-called New Wave advertising is expressly designed to stimulate our senses to an extreme degree. I would call it Old Wave, simply less subtle than before.

The Buddha gave us a useful rule of thumb for dealing with the senses: neither asceticism nor overindulgence. Don't do everything your senses tell you, he would say, but don't try to starve them into submission either. Train them to be your friends and allies. That is what the Buddha called the Middle Path, the road to health and happiness for everybody.

When I try to apply this today, I usually begin with the compulsive urge to eat when it is not necessary. When you are hungry, eat what is best for your body. Eating at any other time shows very slight regard for health, and the mind becomes obese and tyrannical when it gets its way like this at the expense of our better judgment.

Simply put, in the matter of food, following the Middle Path means taking a healthy interest in food but not making food the end of life. I enjoy good food when it is time to eat, but until mealtime comes I don't think about food at all.

Advertisers, by contrast, seem to want us to think about eating twenty-four hours a day. Whenever I go to the supermarket, I notice how the covers of many popular magazines display endless varieties of sweets. Under their influence it is very easy to get into the habit of bringing home this little treat and that little tidbit to munch on. Even if you don't have an eating problem, this habit of automatic buying and snacking takes a real toll on the mind. It weakens the will, divides attention, and keeps thoughts turned outward toward the sense-world – just the opposite of what we need to enter the world within.

If you love your children, I would say, don't get them into the "sweets" habit at all – and if you love adults, don't encourage them in it. On a special occasion, I do

sometimes treat my teenage friends to a gooey chocolate confection. They can take it. But it's not a special occasion every time we can find a convenient excuse. If every event is celebrated with chocolate or candy, a lot of calories are going to find a home around somebody's waist.

If I may say so, as spiritual teachers go, I am really very lenient in these matters. The important thing is to remain clear about your goal; then it is easy to keep a reasonable perspective.

Like many Indians, for example, I still enjoy tea – in fact, friends have given me a special blend that was a favorite of the British royal family. (You may compliment me on my good taste.) I enjoy my mid-afternoon cup of "the beverage that cheers but does not inebriate." On the other hand, the moment I find my mind looking forward to teatime or taking it for granted, I change my routine, which keeps my mind on its toes.

I *am* concerned about caffeine, but my first concern is the mind. Too much tea can injure the nervous system, but anger does much more harm. If you give up anger, you can even drink coffee now and then. These are all matters of common sense.

For most people, this same artistry can be applied with alcohol. When I go to a wedding, I toast the bride and groom with champagne, but on other occasions I simply decline. You may find this awkward at first, but you will be guarding your mind against getting caught in a sensation, which can happen so gradually that you may not even notice. Nobody has ever been offended when I said "No, thank you" at a party where drinks were being served. I don't think anybody ever thought I was a wet blanket. Almost everybody respected my position – partly, I think, because I passed no judgment on others.

I have had many friends who were victims of alcohol but freed themselves from its power through the practice of meditation. One of them paid me a great compliment: "You're a good sport. You never hit below the belt." I know how hard these habits are to give up; I know that the further they progress, the less power we have to choose. But even the most tenacious, long-standing addiction can be conquered. No matter how deep it has gone, with patient effort in meditation we can always go deeper and uproot it from underneath.

With any addiction, the bonding is very much like a kind of cement my friend Stuart once showed me – Krazy Glue. If you get a drop of Krazy Glue on your fingers and accidentally touch your eyelid, you may need minor surgery to get your fingers free. The mind is like that. It has a tremendous capacity to get attached to anything on earth; it is making Krazy Glue twenty-four hours a day. "Get it while

it's fresh," the mind says brightly. "Take as much as you like. The more you take, the bigger the discount." That is the mind for you. Whether it is an addiction to food or drink or smoking or any other physical indulgence, the dynamics of this bonding are always the same.

Here you can see the enormous practicality of the Buddha's presentation. You don't have to treat each addiction by itself, he says. Simply remember to respect the cementing capacity of the mind, and just as you wouldn't touch Krazy Glue to your eyelids, don't touch these potent sensations to your mind. These are not just moral issues for me, any more than they were for the Buddha. His Middle Path is based purely on a clear understanding of how senses and mind function.

Being a good spiritual scientist, the Buddha divides sensations into three convenient categories for us: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. This is not a fixed classification. Sensations can change places; that is where we have freedom. What is pleasant the first time may be unpleasant the fifth; and, most liberating of all, we can take an unpleasant sensation which is in the interest of others and move it joyfully into the "pleasant" category.

The first few times you indulge your senses in a particular way, the Buddha would explain, there is only a sensation. It has no emotive force behind it. But when you start thinking about pleasant sensations over and over, craving to have them again, then the process the Buddha calls *asava* begins. The word shows his sense of poetry as well as his precision. *Asava* actually means an intoxicant, distilled from fruits, flowers, or trees. When a sensation is fresh and new, the Buddha implies, you look at the pretty bottle it comes in and read, "Only two percent alcohol by volume." In other words, you are only thinking about it once in a while; the alcohol content is low. So you say, "What does it matter? Two percent isn't going to do me any harm. I can still function." But the fermentation has begun; that is the danger. The craving is brewing. Whatever the sensation, whether it is food or drugs or sex, the process is the same.

As long as there is no craving involved, there is no bonding between senses and sense-objects. As long as there is no craving, you won't go and raid the liquor cabinet of that sensation against your will. But once fermentation has brought the alcohol content of the sensation to fifty percent, that craving has come to stay. You can't help thinking about it; it can't help thinking about itself. Then it can no longer be classified honestly as a sensation; it is an obsession.

Any liking or slight attachment is a potential obsession. As long as it remains minor, one can enjoy it. If you like coffee or tea, make it a minor attachment – take it or leave it. The same goes for healthy entertainment of all varieties. But if it

is smoking, do not even flirt with danger; leave it. And if it is alcohol or potent mind-bending drugs, take your money and run.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

In this reading, Easwaran is emphasizing the Middle Path – the practice of steering clear of both indulgence and excessive self-denial to find a comfortable, healthy balance in our sense habits. There's probably no one who hasn't tried to make such changes in their food or entertainment habits. It's hard work, and sometimes seems impossible. But an effective grasp of the mental dynamics at work under the surface can make it much less difficult.

Easwaran mentions three categories of sensation. Let's play with these as a way to observe how *asavas* "ferment" in our mind. List a food or entertainment item for each of the four categories:

1. One which you find very pleasant, but which is not really beneficial.
2. One which is neutral to you, but which is generally unhealthy.
3. One which is neutral to you, but which is generally healthy.
4. One which is unpleasant to you, but which is healthy or beneficial for yourself and others.

As you review this list, reflect on your feelings toward each item. In retrospect, can you observe the bonding process at work? Using the Eight Points, how might you shift these items into the proper categories (disliking the unhealthy and liking the healthy)? What does the Middle Path look like in your life?

Note that the two "neutral" categories may be helpful stepping stones in the transformation process. Moving a craving from category 1 to category 2 (from doughnuts to raisins) will be much easier than trying to leap immediately from 1 to 4 (from doughnuts to Brussels sprouts).

Watching the Talk

When it's time for inspiration, please watch 15 minutes of the first talk on the disc, "Patience and Beauty." For those not using the DVD, please start reading the commentary on verses 54–72 in *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, Volume 1.

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON TWO

This week we are continuing our study of Chapter Nine in *Conquest of Mind*, "Obstacles and Opportunities." In Lesson One, we read the first half of the section focused on the spiritual obstacle called "sensuality" by the Buddha. It introduced the term *asava* – a potent craving or selfish tendency in the mind that locks us out of deeper consciousness.

This week, Sri Easwaran outlines the dynamics of attention that create an *asava*. With this reading, and the exercise that follows it, we have a tool for dismantling *asavas* and harnessing the trapped energy to renew and transform personality.

Reading

At this juncture, it may help to venture for a moment into the Buddhist theory of cognition. (I promise the tour will be brief!) In the act of seeing, the Buddha would say, there are three separate elements: the eyes, the object, and an act of attention. When all three come together, there is sensation. Right now, for example, I am seated at a beautiful desk given to me by friends. While I am looking at the desk, I can appreciate its beauty. But when I am reading at it, I do not really see it; my attention is completely absorbed in my book.

The application of this abstract idea is highly practical: if you can withdraw your attention, no sensation on earth can have any hold over you. That sensation simply will not be there for you; it will have no connection with your mind.

When attention is under this kind of control, all the senses are your friends. If they wander off into areas where they can get into trouble, you have only to call them back and they will obey. This is what you have been doing in meditation all along, bringing your attention back whenever it strays. Now you can apply the same skill during the day, whenever the mind feels attracted by some old sensory habit.

Without this kind of control, however, the habit itself compels attention. Then you have no choice: if you see something you desire, your mind will not stop thinking about it until it is good and ready. When we have a strong liking or disliking for something, we cannot really see that thing for what it is. A fog comes between us and that object, a fog of potential obsession. Our attention is not really on the thing in question; it is locked onto our liking or disliking.

The next development in sensory obsession is anger. You try to go on satisfying your desires, trying to get what you want either in some relationship or some possession or experience, and things keep getting in your way. That is life. But the

more this happens, the further the fermentation process goes. The desire becomes obsessive. You get frustrated, irritated, resentful, hostile, angry – which means that the alcohol content of the craving is enough to put you under the table.

I once asked a friend just how much alcohol a drink can have. "Well," he said, "there's a brand of Puerto Rican rum called '151.'" I was impressed. Rum that is one hundred and fifty-one proof is seventy-five percent alcohol. This is a good description of anger: you are drunk and can't get inside your own consciousness to see what is wrong. On rare occasions, just like someone drunk on alcohol, you get sentimental, but most of the time you are increasingly difficult to get along with. That is how one develops an "angry personality," a condition that is almost an epidemic today.

When this happens you are continuously angry, constantly hostile – if not overtly, then beneath the surface, where thoughts simmer unaware. You see things that are not there and act on situations that simply do not exist the way you perceive them. It is impossible to reason with people in this advanced condition; they are drunk with anger. And the primary cause is getting involved in sense-stimulations to the point of obsession. Anger is the final development of the Buddha's first obstacle.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Easwaran wrote: "When we have a strong liking or disliking for something, we cannot really see that thing for what it is. A fog comes between us and that object, a fog of potential obsession. Our attention is not really on the thing in question; it is locked onto our liking or disliking."

Have you noticed this dynamic at work in your consciousness? Are there times in which you aren't so much aware of the experience itself as the fact that you like it, want it, or crave it? Are there times when your attention is locked on disliking something (or someone) so much that you're not really present? How might you use the Eight Points to redirect your attention in such circumstances? How might you find a positive focus for your attention – one that is strong enough to compete with the craving?

Some hints: notice how, as your mind dwells on a craving, other things and people tend to seem like obstacles. When experiencing a craving, how might you slow down the mind and your reactions, and pay close attention to the subject at hand? How might you let the thought of the craving recede, like the desk in Easwaran's example?

Watching the Talk

When it's time for inspiration, please watch the second half of the first talk on the DVD, "Patience and Beauty." For those not using the video, please continue reading the commentary on verses 54–72 in *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, Volume 1.

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON THREE

This week we are continuing our study of Chapter Nine in *Conquest of Mind*, "Obstacles and Opportunities." In the first two lessons, we read the first section, which focuses on the spiritual obstacle called "sensuality" by the Buddha. It introduced the term *asava* – a potent craving or selfish tendency in the mind that locks us out of deeper consciousness.

This week, Easwaran examines another sort of *asava* that creates a great deal of stress and discord in our minds: ill will.

Reading

2. Ill Will

The second obstacle, ill will, is perhaps the most serious impediment in meditation. According to the Buddha, ill will expresses itself in one hundred and thirty-five forms! Each of us has a regular catalog of them. That is what makes ill will so difficult to recognize at first, leave aside how difficult it is to tackle. If only we could get a catalog of negative mental formations like the ones that come in the mail every other week from L. L. Bean! Fortunately, says the Buddha, tackling ill will does not require becoming familiar with the whole catalog. What we have to do is learn how to undo the underlying habit of mind – again, the asava.

Sensations in the mind ferment just the way sensory impressions do. When somebody ignores our predilections or fails to do things our way, we get an unpleasant feeling which is familiar to everyone. At first it may last no longer than writing on water. But when this feeling comes frequently, it starts fermenting. Now, just as with a sensory experience, we don't have to feel dislike every time life crosses us; we can simply withdraw our attention. But when our attention is riveted on ourselves, every negative experience adds to the alcohol content of our ill will. The diagnosis is penetrating. We develop a tendency to dislike – not just to dislike this or that but simply to dislike, period. Whoever comes in the way of that dislike gets it.

The Buddha uses strong language here, to shake us out of our bad habits. You are not being very bright when you dislike someone, he says. Don't blame that person; he or she has merely happened to come in your way. Your disliking asava is *inside*, fermenting away; that is all that is happening.

On thousands of coconut palms in my native state of Kerala, you will find pots hanging to collect the sweet milk of the trees for brewing toddy. The Buddha must

have been familiar with a similar sight in the villages of northern India. As the liquid sits in these pots, it ferments and becomes so strong that crows who drink it sometimes start cawing at midnight. "It's not time to get up," my grandmother used to explain when we heard this. "The crows are just drunk." This is the attitude behind the Buddha's compassion. The fellow who flies into a tearing rage is not responsible, he says. He is "under the influence." Don't hold it against him; he can't see straight. That is what ill will does.

Let us take a closer look at this fascinating distilling process in the mind. Take the case of a resentment – over what your boyfriend said to you last weekend at that fancy restaurant, for example; or, more accurately, over what you thought he was saying. While the resentment is fermenting, you are busy thinking to yourself over and over, "Oh, so *that's* what he meant!" Then you start rehearsing things to say to him when you run into him again.

At times like this, what we are really doing is slowly developing a compulsive tendency to think in negative terms. In fact, we are working on that tendency very hard. The issue is not what that particular person said or did not say, meant or did not mean. The real issue is that we are developing a tendency to dwell compulsively on what *anybody* says to us – which means we are developing a tendency to get upset. We are making ourselves upsettable, emotionally fragile under stress. After enough of this fermenting, our mind will boil at the most harmless little thing. We will be at the mercy of everyone. The Buddha's final diagnosis: we do not generally suffer from others; we suffer from ourselves.

The cure is to go against that habit. Never accuse others or blame them; try to refrain even in your own thoughts. When the liquor of ill will is ready to flow out of the bottle on the slightest provocation, put the cork back in the bottle and push it down hard with your mantram. After all, there is always going to be a certain amount of unwitting unkindness in life. It is up to us not to become unkind in turn.

A six-year-old friend of mine once provided me with a good illustration of this. He likes dates but does not think much of figs. A few mornings ago, in the hurry of the moment, I gave him a fig I had saved for him from my breakfast. When I realized my mistake, I was a little anxious about what he was going to say. He was wearing his usual very thoughtful expression. It touched me when he turned to his mother and explained, "I don't think Uncle meant to give me this." Cultivating a positive attitude, you see. It was true: I forgot he is a date man, which I should have remembered. His courtesy is a lesson from which all of us can learn.

When somebody is curt to us, it is easy to take it personally. But this is a habit which can be unlearned in the same way it was acquired. Pull back from your mind a little and remind yourself, "Why get angry? The poor fellow may not have slept well. Maybe he hurried through his breakfast and tripped on the stairs; he's probably still getting over all these indignities. Why should I hold it against him?"

Today I don't even have to work at this response. It has become second nature to do everything I can to cork up a fermenting asava. My mind no longer goes into turmoil; it is always at peace. But I had to learn this the hard way, just as everyone does: by trying to do it over and over and over, even when it hurt.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

In this reading, Easwaran outlines a fascinating approach to conflict in personal interactions: rather than devoting our attention to "sorting things out" with our intellect, trying to decide who's right and who's wrong, or "what she really meant," we can simply work to reduce the ill will in our minds. Such work does not always take the place of "sorting things out." Occasionally we do need to offer constructive criticism to others. But the more we can reduce the ill will in our mind, the more secure, healthy, and kind we will be, no matter what the details of the situation. Then the criticism is more likely to be truly constructive.

This week we'll examine an area in which all of us have experienced ill will at various times: taking things personally. Easwaran says that we take things personally because we are *upsettable*.

Where in your life are you upsettable? How might you use the Eight Points to reduce your upsettability?

Reflect a bit on the antidotes to upsettability which Easwaran offers here:

1. Don't dwell on the incident that upset you.
2. Use the mantram as a substitute for thinking about it.
3. Create a compassionate explanation for what the other person has said or done.

How might you apply these strategies, using the Eight Points?

Watching the Talk

When it's time for inspiration, please read the following introduction and watch 15 minutes of the second talk on the DVD, "The Climax of Spiritual Evolution." For those not using the

video, please continue reading the commentary on verses 54–72 in *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, Volume 1.

In this talk on the Dhammapada, Easwaran focuses on that part of ourselves – the deepest part – that is always striving to evolve towards more wisdom and beauty. He uses a Sanskrit word, *Kala*, which means time, in the context of speaking about a beauty that time cannot touch.

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON FOUR

This week we will delve further into Chapter Nine of *Conquest of Mind*, "Obstacles and Opportunities." Last week we started reading about the spiritual obstacle called "ill will" by the Buddha, with an emphasis on the Buddhist term *asava*, which signifies a potent craving or selfish tendency in the mind that locks us out of deeper consciousness.

In this reading, Sri Easwaran will be steering us toward the spiritual opportunity hidden in ill will. Kindness, he says, is the antidote to ill will, and can become an entire approach to life, healing our relationships, bringing peace to our hearts, and gradually transforming our home, workplace, and community.

Reading

In secular psychology the problems of resentment against parents are dealt with in one class; then you go and deal with the problems of competition between partners in another. The mind-catalog has so many varieties of asava that you will never have time to take classes for them all. By focusing on the asava process, however, we can see that essentially there is only one kind of ill will. A resentful person from Topeka will have much the same asavas as a resentful person from Taiwan. The way to protect yourself against any ill-will asava is the same: do not let your mind dwell on any unpleasant memory or negative thought. This precious capacity comes as meditation deepens.

When somebody has gone on a drinking binge, my friends tell me, the first thing to do is "dry him out." This is just what the Buddha recommends for an asava too. If you were to go to the Compassionate Buddha and complain, "That person makes me so upset!" he would reply drily, "You're not being quite accurate. You don't get upset because he makes you upset; you get upset because your mind is upsettable. Why don't you make yourself less upsettable?" Use the power you draw from meditation to change the alcoholic asava of ill will back into the milk of kindness – not by breaking off your relationships, but by being with people even if they upset you.

This may be hard on you, but if it is any consolation, it is probably hard on them too. Work with them, support them, refrain from unkind remarks and unkind acts. That is the way to develop good will. I am not blind to selfish motives, but I never avoid people. I refuse to allow resentment to cloud my eyes or lessen my love. I can be firm with people; there are occasions when I have to be stern. But I don't think anybody misunderstands this sternness as lack of love.

I want you to know that I was not born with these capacities. This kind of patience and endurance came only after a lot of practice, working with people who could be quite difficult. All of us have the same capacity for maintaining harmonious relationships. What we need to develop is the will to bear with people when the going gets rough – to stick it out, as you say. And that simply comes with trying.

Here we can see why the Buddha has been called such a supreme psychologist. Those who like to be separate, he says, make a practice of disliking people because the more they dislike, the more separate they become. The opposite, fortunately, is just as true: the more you practice liking people, the more deeply you will feel one with them – and, miraculously, the deeper you will find yourself going in meditation too.

This strategy of doing the opposite of what a compulsion dictates is also the answer to a tragic state of mind I sometimes run into, where someone will tell me in all honesty, "I just don't like myself." This is one of the worst possible kinds of ill will, largely because it undercuts one's capacity to change. If we look on it as the same asava of ill will, however, the treatment becomes simple. When you are always kind to others, kindness becomes an attitude. Your natural response is to be kind. Then you cannot help being kind to yourself as well; you will develop a habit of supporting yourself.

The splendor of the human being – every human being – is our capacity to learn from past mistakes. I never ask anyone, "Why did you make that mistake?" I ask only, "Have you learned from it?" This was always Granny's emphasis when I was growing up. The Buddha, similarly, is trying gently to warn us about life's method of teaching us the adverse effects of ill will. "If you do not learn from the harm your ill will causes others," he tells us point-blank, "life will find ways of hurting you more and more."

This is where the Buddha uses a term which I translate gently as "slow on the uptake." The Buddha doesn't expect us to be saints; he just asks that we use our heads. Our problems are of our own making, he says, and the way out of our problems lies in making wiser choices in how we think and act toward others. This is actually a very hopeful approach, which never dooms any human being as "wicked" or "lost." It is only when we refuse to learn from our own mistakes that we find we are leading ourselves into despair.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Here Easwaran is encouraging us to develop an attitude of kindness, so that our natural response is to be kind. Identify one or two places in your life – relationships or situations – in which you could be more kind. How might you use the Eight Points to develop an attitude of kindness in that situation? How might you make it natural, even inevitable, to act kindly?

Easwaran also talks about being more kind to ourselves. Identify an area in which you tend to be unkind to yourself. How might that change if you develop a general attitude of kindness?

Watching the Talk

When it's time for inspiration, please read the following introduction and watch the second half of the second talk on the DVD, "The Climax of Spiritual Evolution." For those not using the video, please finish reading the commentary on verses 54–72 in *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, Volume 1.

In this talk on the Dhammapada, Easwaran focuses on that part of ourselves – the deepest part – that is always striving to evolve towards more wisdom and beauty. He refers to a pun used by the Indian mystic Sri Ramakrishna. The spiritual life is not the reading of *granthas* (books) but the untying of *granthis* (knots – referring to the knots in our consciousness from which we are released as we move towards the climax of spiritual evolution, called nirvana or *samadhi*).

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

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