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THE TALKS OF EKNATH EASWARAN

The Enlightened Ones
The Glory of the Earth

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 BMC M 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@easwaran.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.easwaran.org/fellowship

LESSON ONE

This month we conclude our study of *Conquest of Mind* with the two most challenging strategies for Self-realization recommended by the Buddha. This week we focus on “going to the root,” finding the real cause of our problems – self-will.

Reading

It is only fair to warn you that the Buddha is slowly backing us into a corner. This is his method of drawing his audience deeper. Often he starts out talking about familiar topics which do not challenge us much, but slowly he brings his scrutiny closer and closer until we find him right in front of us, looking us straight in the eye. Now he is upon us, saying, “The fourth strategy is ‘Go to the root.’ The first three strategies are preliminary. Now it is time to remove the real cause of your problems: why you get jealous, why you find yourself in a bad mood so often, why you get resentful with so little provocation.”

This is not to say that the first three strategies are unimportant. Without them we cannot even speak of going to the root of personal problems; they go so deep in the mind that we cannot reach them. But when our meditation can penetrate like a microscope, the Buddha can show us the bacillus that has been causing all our personal problems: self-will.

Some of the bacilli studied in medical school, I understand, can hide behind a number of symptoms. Self-will, similarly, is the root cause of problems very disparate in appearance. Some are so familiar that we think they are normal, or at worst beyond our control. Jealousy is one particularly strong form the infection takes. In a competitive society jealousy has to be rife, because comparing oneself with others is the very basis of both. Jealousy may disguise itself as mild and rational – over a friend’s appearance, a co-worker’s success, a neighbor’s new car, a brother-in-law’s happiness or prestige. But jealousy in any form is malignant. If it becomes a habit of mind, it can erode our security and self-confidence to a fragile shell.

There is no reason to be surprised if we find ourselves afflicted with this condition. We are conditioned on all sides to compare ourselves with others, to climb higher by pulling others down, to gain by taking, to win by making others lose. The few times I have gone to sports events in this country, for example, I have been pained by the language coaches sometimes use to spur their teams. By the end of the third quarter, the simple “Go get ‘em!” has been replaced by the even more primitive “Kill!”

The antidote to this kind of overzealous competition was given by an English poet in familiar lines: what matters is “not that you won or lost, but how you played the game.” Often I don’t even remember who wins a good match. I remember a spectacular match between Bjorn Borg and Jimmy Connors when I was so full of admiration for the play on both sides that at the end I exclaimed, “Why don’t they give a first-place trophy to both players?” The preoccupation with winning is not at all a mature outlook to cultivate. No matter how high the stakes, as human beings we should manage to keep our opponent’s welfare in view as well as our own. This attitude will help us stay free from the severe anxieties and animosities that overzealous competition breeds.

The quality we *should* try to cultivate is the exact opposite of competition. The term in Sanskrit is *mridu*: soft, gentle, tender, sweet. In the *Mahabharata*, the tremendous epic of which the Bhagavad Gita is a small part, a beautiful verse reminds us that one who is really strong is gentle. Only a weak person resorts to harsh, rude, vengeful behavior. Those who are full of inner strength can tire you out with their patience, their consideration, and their unflinching love.

In a personal relationship, I don’t think anything can be more effective. Coming from a large matriarchal family, I grew up in an atmosphere where women practiced this kind of strength as a way of life. I can proudly say that I have yet to see anyone who did not respond to tenderness in action. Even when momentarily angry or agitated, everyone responds to the kind of tenderness that is tough inside, that can oppose when necessary without being brusque. Without this kind of inner toughness, the Buddha tells us plainly, it is not possible to maintain a continuously loving relationship with anyone.

To find successful representations of love these days, either in art or in life, is like coming upon an oasis in a desert. The Buddha gives us far higher standards. We should learn to be continuously in love, he implies; and not only that, our love should always grow. We should never allow ourselves to fall out of love; otherwise love cannot last.

From this you can get some idea of the immensity of the task he is laying out for us. Yet it is possible for all of us to aim for what Catholic mystics call “love without an object,” in which anyone who comes within our orbit receives the fullness of our love. This is the lofty state that the sincere practice of meditation and its allied disciplines can put within our reach.

The moment somebody says, “I don’t like that person,” I tell myself, “What an opportunity!” I am not being rhetorical. That is how I see a dislike now: as a grand avenue opening up onto a more joyful future. “She irritates me” translates as “She

can teach me to be more patient.” “He intimidates me” can be heard as “He gives me the opportunity to make myself unshakable.” Again, this is a matter of emphasizing the positive everywhere. Every ordeal we can look on as an opportunity to become stronger and more patient; every confrontation, as a chance to learn how to cooperate. Every obstacle in life can become a precious opportunity to grow.

This is why the Buddha calls his path “going against the current.” If you want to follow me to freedom, he says, be prepared to swim upstream, against the river of conditioning. Be prepared to grapple continuously with the fierce flow of your negative mental currents. Struggling like this builds up our muscles. In time our strokes will become almost effortless and our sense of purpose irresistible.

When you feel jealous of somebody, therefore, the answer is not in competing; that will only make your case of insecurity worse. Why should you compare yourself with anyone? The very basis of security for every one of us is the assurance that the Lord dwells within us as our very Self. The deeper you go in meditation, the more sure of this you feel, the more at home with yourself and the world around you. Whoever you are, whatever your weaknesses, you know you can fulfill the purpose of your life and be a blessing to many others.

Every one of us can make an enormous contribution to life. What is important is how steadfastly we are practicing the spiritual disciplines that bring us closer to life’s goal. When you are giving this effort your very best, nothing that another person has, nothing that another person is, can draw your envy. Gradually you will come to feel that you live in everybody. What reason could you have to envy anyone on the face of the earth?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

In this reading, Sri Easwaran is suggesting that we can build our capacity to love by learning to identify self-will as it arises in daily living, and taking steps to reduce it. In terms of the Eight Point Program, this is putting others first. Please take a few minutes to reflect silently on some of your relationships. When problems arise, such as misunderstandings or conflicts or alienation, what role does your self-will play in contributing to them? Note that the other person’s self-will may very well be involved, and may play a major role in causing the problem. But in nearly every problem, it is possible to find some way in which our own self-will is contributing to the difficulty, if only in reaction to another person’s agitation. That portion of our own self-will is the “lever” we can press to improve the situation.

Now, in the light of this reading, how might you “swim against the current” of your self-will? In what small way might you change your responses so as gradually to subtract your own personal agitation from emotionally charged situations? How might the other allied disciplines aid you in this?

When it's time for inspiration, please watch the first half of the first talk on the disc, “The Enlightened Ones.”

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON TWO

We are studying the final chapter of *Conquest of Mind*, entitled “Strategies for Freedom.” This week we move to the last, seemingly impossible strategy – eliminating the source of our problems by extinguishing self-will (or the “ego”) completely. In our discussion, let’s use the term *self-will* rather than *ego*, because in certain schools of psychology the term *ego* can refer to a healthy function of personality, while most people will agree that self-will is a limiting factor in our personal development, disrupting relationships and impeding spiritual growth.

We will be reading what Sri Easwaran says about one of the most important qualities needed for Self-realization: compassionate detachment. Entering into the unconscious can sometimes be a dismaying experience, when we discover how much our *asavas* (unconscious habits of mind) have been causing the problems we previously attributed to other people. At such times there is a great temptation to get distracted or fall asleep in meditation in order to avoid making these uncomfortable discoveries.

However, by cultivating compassionate detachment towards ourselves and others we can learn to bear the discomfort and discover the tremendous rewards of deepening self-awareness. We can see that, though it’s true that self-will has influenced our thinking, we now have the capacity to change, finding new opportunities for love in our relationships and drawing us closer to others.

Spiritual fellowship, or *satsang*, is the ideal context for this work, and that will be the focus of our reflection.

Reading

The Buddha has been building toward a tremendous climax. With the first strategy he starts out tickling us with a feather, as it were. Then he coaxes us along with a branch. Finally, when he is sure we can stand it, he cracks us over the head with the whole trunk. That is the Buddha’s way, and he is going to bring on the trunk right now. “After you have learned to deal with the mind in these four ways,” he says, “prepare yourself for *abhinigraha*.” It sounds ominous, and it is. *Nigraha* means “destroy”; *abhi*, “completely.” “Kill the very source of your difficulties,” the Buddha says, “and then make doubly sure that it is dead.” That is the Buddha for you.

After you have been meditating sincerely for years, you will find that a number of beneficial changes have gradually been taking place. You have learned how to deal effectively with most difficulties in life, and the quality of your daily living has improved immensely. But you have descended gradually to a level of consciousness where your compulsions, your *asavas* or *samskaras*, are few but ferocious. Instead

of a hundred Lilliputians to fight with, you now face a mighty Goliath. You may not recognize him at first, but you feel there is something very familiar about him. Small wonder: he is the ego, your very own expression of separateness, selfishness, and self-will.

At this level we begin to see clearly how many of our difficulties in life, particularly in personal relationships, have been caused by this arrogant creature. Fortunately, by this time we have also developed enough compassion not to blame ourselves, any more than we blame other people for their shortcomings. Otherwise we could easily be overwhelmed by a sense of guilt. We are making an amazing discovery: this petty creature is not who we really are. He is an imposter, pretending to be us, and all these years he has fooled not only others but ourselves. This discovery frees us to put all our energy into fighting back against the ego without quarter.

In the Christian tradition this aggressive figure is called the devil. There is practical wisdom in this tradition, for it reminds us to identify not with the ego but with the Self. The Sufi mystic Jalaluddin Rumi answered those who said they did not believe in the devil with a simple statement: "Look into your own hearts." The devil merely personifies the dark forces that every human being has inside: self-will, violence, anger, greed, jealousy, revenge.

The struggle with self-will goes on and on and on, throughout the day and eventually throughout the night. Actually, this is a struggle that we take up from the very first day of meditation, and the harder we try at the disciplines, the sooner we will win. This is the culmination of all our years of struggling at spiritual growth. We are in the finals, at Wimbledon on Centre Court. Do Steffi Graf or Jimmy Connors complain when they face a rugged opponent in the finals? They find a fierce joy in it; they know the very difficulty of the challenge will draw out their best. The Buddha's words of encouragement are in this same vein: "Clench your teeth." That is a literal translation. Play hard, he says, and every time you lose a point, hit back – by defying a selfish urge.

You will come to find a wonderful exhilaration in this battle. The rounds can go on for hours at a time. They can be drawn out for days, weeks, even months together, with a lot of give-and-take on both sides. You get worn out, but you hang on out of sheer determination.

Yet there comes a time in the lives of even great mystics when they lament, "I cannot do this by myself. How can I defeat my own self-will?" This critical juncture is when the spiritual teacher comes to the rescue. My own teacher, my grandmother, taught me from a very early age to defy my self-will. Much later, after I took to meditation, she was able to awaken in me the overwhelming desire not to be dic-

tated to by self-will under any circumstances. This great desire gradually began to draw the power of all my other, smaller desires; finally, all my desires flowed together into the colossal desire to defeat self-will and be free. That is why it is so important to strive to unify desires from the outset. Ultimately there is not the slightest doubt that everyone who practices these disciplines with sustained enthusiasm can and will win this battle. The main question is how long we are going to let ourselves get knocked about first.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

In the last paragraph of this reading, Easwaran emphasizes the important role played by the spiritual teacher. For many of us, one of the times when we feel most connected to Easwaran as our spiritual teacher is when we are participating in spiritual fellowship. Spending time with others who share our spiritual interest and aspiration can reawaken the fire of enthusiasm when it has dwindled. It can remind us of the many little victories that our practice of the Eight Points has brought us, even when the challenges seem too big to surmount. And it can help us develop compassion for ourselves as well as others, at those times when self-will obscures the Self.

Please reflect on how spiritual fellowship – whether at a BMCM retreat or Satsang, or with your faith's congregation, or with other kindred spirits – has helped you cultivate compassionate detachment. How has it given you the strength to cling to your ideals? How has it helped you draw closer to what Easwaran calls the inner teacher – the voice of wisdom within you? How might you deepen your experience of spiritual fellowship?

When it's time for inspiration, please watch the second half of the first talk on the disc, "The Enlightened Ones."

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON THREE

This week's reading picks up where we left off last week, in the middle of a section devoted to the most difficult challenge in the spiritual life, extinguishing self-will. Sri Easwaran is analyzing self-will in the context of the Buddha's term *asava*, meaning a compulsive, unconscious tendency of the mind to dwell on things. We will concentrate our reflection and discussion on how to use slowing down to win over this "dwelling capacity" of the mind, and use it to our benefit.

Reading

The central *asava* in self-will, remember, is the tendency to get selfishly attached. Earlier I used the word "obsession." Most people have an inherent tendency to dwell on things, to think about something over and over and over. We developed this precious capacity through millions of years of evolution. I say "precious" because one-pointed absorption, when free, is the secret of genius. Without it, we could never learn to meditate. But usually this capacity is not free. That is what happens when we dwell on ourselves. Then thinking becomes compulsive and we lose the choice of what to dwell on. It is this adhesive *asava* of attachment which gets us stuck in all sorts of difficulties, particularly in personal relationships.

To paint a vivid picture of this elusive character, Self-will, and his typical habits, I am going to draw on a pastime which I usually don't even like to mention: fishing. The seriousness of this topic calls for a strong image. So picture, if you will, Self-will as the Father *Asava*, seated on his riverbank in one of those fold-up hammock chairs and decked out in waterproof rubber pants, fishing in the troubled waters of consciousness. He has his cooler full of beer close at hand in case he gets bored, but usually you will find him about to nod off, with a slightly wicked grin on his face, waiting for an unpleasant memory to happen along. When he feels a nibble on the line, he jerks into action and slowly starts reeling it in, involving us more and more in a negative line of thinking.

What happens when we become the victim of an obsession is easy to picture. Even if we have been caught before, the bait seems so attractive that we still feel we have to bite. We may even come to believe that being caught by Father *Asava*, that dangling at the end of the line with a hook in our mouth, is the greatest thing in the world. If we are not careful, Father *Asava* will reel us in and stick us away in his little basket.

You can imagine the determination and courage it takes to keep swimming in the other direction while this fisherman is slowly reeling us in. It hurts to pull loose

from an asava, especially if the hook has gone deep. That is the kind of effort required to undo a powerful asava like resentment.

Much more efficient, of course, is not to get hooked in the first place. Yet even when an obsession is fairly strong, there are still ways to take out the hook. One is to refuse to act on that obsession, however strong the pull. You may not yet be able to change your line of thinking, but you can make a good effort not to speak or act the way it is urging you to; otherwise you are playing into the fisherman's hands.

A second way is to not incriminate other people. Those who fall into the habit of blaming others for their compulsive attachments and obsessions are swimming straight for the hook and biting hard. When you feel that somebody is causing you trouble, for example, or purposely trying to agitate you, or pursuing you, or avoiding you, remind yourself, "This is just old Father Asava, fishing in troubled waters." You may find it helpful to keep a little reminder on your desk or calendar, where you can see it often. It will help you, and it will help the people you feel inclined to blame as well.

Here is the positive side: this same capacity for habitual obsession, if we can win it over, becomes a splendid capacity for continual contemplation. That is the intent behind each of the eight points in my program. I think it is also the reason that the Compassionate Buddha never advocated ascetic practices but always taught the Middle Path. Virtually all our human faculties – our senses, our emotions, our imagination, our intellect, our will – are meant to serve us as friends. We should win them over, not crush them, because we are going to need all of them as our allies later on in the struggle against self-will.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Here, Easwaran gives two ideas for how we can avoid ending up in Father Asava's basket. But they're both difficult. One is to refuse to act on the obsession, "however strong the pull." The other is not to blame others.

As hard as we may try to pursue these two strategies, often before we know it we find ourselves being "reeled in" by a compulsive line of thinking – whether its lure is anger, fear, or greed. In Easwaran's perspective, one of the reasons this happens is that we are moving so fast through life, and our thoughts are racing so fast, that we miss the opportunity to change our instinctive behavior.

Can you observe this dynamic in your life? If you were to adopt a slower pace, how might that make you less vulnerable to the lure of compulsive self-willed thinking? Remember Easwaran's

“red pencil” exercise, in which he listed all his daily activities and drew a line through those that were neither necessary nor beneficial. If you were to do that today, what items might be reduced or eliminated? How might that help you slow down and reduce self-will?

If you were able to redirect your capacity to dwell on things, to what would you direct it? What positive focus could absorb the energy and attention that now goes into negative channels?

When it's time for inspiration, please watch the first half of the second talk on the disc, “The Glory of the Earth.”

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

LESSON FOUR

This week we reach the thrilling conclusion of our year of study. Throughout *Conquest of Mind*, Sri Easwaran has been examining the dynamics of the mind. He has shown us how to break the connection between stimulus and response, how to juggle with our likes and dislikes, how to think in freedom and love continuously.

In Chapter Ten, “Strategies for Freedom,” he has walked us through the final, seemingly impossible challenge facing every spiritual aspirant – eliminating self-will. Now, in the book’s concluding paragraphs, he reveals the tremendous spiritual force which enabled the great mystics to achieve the impossible – or rather, to witness this great transformation occurring in their own lives. None of them, Easwaran has said, would say that they *achieved* Self-realization by themselves. They did all they could and gave all they had, and found themselves carried forward by a force much greater than themselves.

Reading

In practical terms, what does it mean never to be hooked by self-will? It means the agitation in your mind ceases. Everybody, I think, knows the feeling of helplessness that comes with an agonizing memory, a paralyzing fear, a maddening conflict. We just don’t know what to do, and the memory, the fear, the conflict, repeats itself over and over and over in our mind. The agony lies not in the memory or fear or conflict but in the repetition. When we are not hooked by self-will, we can stop the repetitive agitation of the mind cold. When the mind is still, how can there be agitation? We still grieve when others suffer, but we do not suffer for ourselves; and our grief for others releases the will and resources to love and help and serve.

The key to this is detachment – detachment from our own ego, which is terribly difficult to cultivate. Here, devotion to a divine incarnation – Jesus, Sri Krishna, the Buddha, the Divine Mother – helps greatly, for it gives us a focus for our love outside the narrow compass of self-will. The subtlety is that this divine focus is not outside us. The Lord is our real Self, embodying the divine qualities which all of us have within us.

It follows that when we are looking for the Lord, unifying our desires to realize him, the Lord is looking for us at the same time. Meister Eckhart, the towering mystic of medieval Germany, goes even further: the eye with which you see God, he says, is the same eye with which God is looking all the time at you. Imagine peeking through a keyhole in the mind and seeing the Lord looking back at you! We don’t realize that he can open the door to deeper consciousness from inside;

yet silently, subtly, all the time we are banging away on the door, he is undoing the latch on the other side. This is what devotion to a spiritual ideal can do.

My own spiritual ideal is Sri Krishna, whose teachings in the Bhagavad Gita give us a perfect manual for spiritual living. The literal meaning of the name *Krishna* is “he who attracts us”: he who draws us to him, right from within. The pull the Lord can exert is infinite, yet he can only draw us as close as we want to come. Only when we throw aside our excess luggage, the dead weight of our love for self-centered pursuits, can he draw us to himself.

I have learned to look upon Sri Krishna as my divine employer, my Boss. He takes much better care of us than we do of ourselves. From the first day I saw how he cares for those who serve him, my heart has belonged to him. There have been instances in the early days of the Blue Mountain Center when, being human, I sometimes made poor decisions. But such is Sri Krishna’s love that he says, “Even though your decision was wrong, the consequences are going to be right because you were trying to act in my service.” This is infinite love. After all, what boss on earth will say, “You’ve made a poor decision, but I’m still going to promote you”?

This is the assurance you get when you devote your life selflessly to a supreme cause. Even before Self-realization, if you have done your best and still find yourself getting caught by an asava or sinking under the steady attack of self-will, the Lord will guard you if you call on him sincerely with all your heart.

When you realize the divine Self within you, the Bhagavad Gita says, you are launched beyond superficial living like a missile. Your joy and your capacity to contribute to life are multiplied a million times. To inspire us, the Buddha has given us in one sentence a model of ourselves as glorious and yet as human as any we could ever desire. “Love the whole world,” he says, “as a mother loves her only child.” Love like this will plunge us into deepest consciousness and release in us the power to make a lasting contribution to all of life.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

In this excerpt, Easwaran is implying that in order to transcend self-will, with which we identify ourselves so compulsively, we need a deeper sense of who we really are. The lure of selfishness is so great that we can only let go of it when we see a vastly more fulfilling experience beckoning to us, urging us to leave behind the petty limitations of self-will for the experience of loving without limit.

In the Eight Point Program, reading the mystics is the point designed to help us draw upon this powerful force, called devotion or spiritual longing. In what ways has reading the mystics increased your longing for spiritual growth, or your devotion to your spiritual ideal? How might you deepen your practice of reading the mystics? How might you use the other points to deepen your devotion?

When it's time for inspiration, please watch the second half of the second talk on the disc, "The Glory of the Earth."

Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

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