

The Talks of Eknath Easwaran: Tape 20

Study Guide for ***The Gita's Divine Vision***

The Source of Inner Peace

Introduction

On this tape you will find two talks depicting the radiant vision of life presented in the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Easwaran's most cherished scripture. Commenting on many of his favorite verses, drawn mainly from the tenth chapter of the Gita, Sri Easwaran conveys with great devotion and artistry his vision of the universe as an expression of God's love.

For Sri Easwaran, this experience of union is inseparable from inner peace, and in this talk he gives very practical advice for gradually establishing that peace in our mind and heart. The more peaceful we become, the more we are able to perceive the unity and beauty of the world around us until, eventually, the barriers fall and we ourselves become instruments of God's love in the world.

Practical Exercise

In this exercise we will explore the connection between the way we see the world and our efforts to establish a more peaceful state of mind.

In this talk, Sri Easwaran says that meditation can bring us the capacity to have a mind so filled with peace that no discord with other people can upset us: "You always know that this is the home in which all of us live as children of God." One way to start cultivating this most difficult capacity is to learn to direct our attention to what is best in others, thus reducing our agitation and also encouraging them to rise to their highest potential.

This week, try to improve one of your relationships that is problematic, where you have felt some discord or unease. (Please note: use your common sense and discrimination in this exercise. It's best to start with a situation where the difficulties are relatively small, even trivial.) Make a special effort to ignore the problem, or that aspect of the other person's behavior which has upset you. Instead, focus all your attention on the positive. You may want to write out some good qualities of the other person, or list some of the things he or she has done for you in the past.

This exercise is not meant to supplant your efforts to correct a negative or harmful situation. Rather, it is one strategy which can yield great results by revealing positive

aspects of the situation which you may have overlooked or undervalued. This exercise is a way of reminding yourself of what Sri Easwaran calls the “original goodness” which dwells in everyone’s heart.

Recommended Reading

The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living, Chapter 10. Commentaries on verses 1–9.

Suggested Passages for Meditation

St. Catherine of Genoa, “A Sea of Peace” in *God Makes the Rivers to Flow*.

Sri Sarada Devi, “The Whole World Is Your Own” in *God Makes the Rivers to Flow*.

Remembering God Everywhere

Introduction

In this talk, Sri Easwaran is again commenting on verses from the eighth and tenth chapters of the Bhagavad Gita, with special emphasis on how we can use the mantram to purify our thinking process and fit ourselves for the divine vision described by the Gita.

He is speaking on New Year's Eve in 1988, and uses the occasion to exhort his students to their fullest effort during the coming year to deepen their meditation and make a contribution to establishing peace and harmony in the world.

He closes the talk with a beautiful passage by the Franciscan priest Fra Giovanni Gioconda (c.1445 – 1525). It is a blessing which eloquently restates the promise of the Gita: Behind the apparent diversity and discord of the world, we can become aware of a single divine force of love and wisdom, with which we can unite ourselves through the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Practical Exercise

Our topic for this exercise is again the search for original goodness. But this time we will direct our attention not to others but to ourselves. In this talk, Sri Easwaran speaks of the mantram as a very effective method for remembering that there is a divine spark that dwells within all creatures. One of the situations in which it is sometimes difficult to remember that spark is when we feel regret or frustration about a negative quality in ourselves.

Take five minutes (no more than that!) to reflect and choose a trait about yourself – a habit or tendency – that you would like to change for the better. Reflect on what would be the corresponding positive quality. For instance, if you've chosen a tendency to be quick to anger, the corresponding positive would be patience. If you've chosen a tendency to be stubborn and self-willed, the corresponding positive would be yielding and flexible. Once you've chosen a positive quality, write it at the top of a page and write the mantram for five minutes.

In Sri Easwaran's vision of original goodness, that positive quality is already within you, though it may be partially obscured. During the coming week, try as much as you can to display that positive quality in every way. Once a day, try to take a few minutes to write the mantram as a way of redirecting your attention to this positive quality in yourself.

It is important to follow these directions carefully, and not to spend more than five minutes in identifying a trait you wish to change in yourself. After that, devote all your attention and willpower to concentrating on the corresponding positive quality.

Recommended Reading

The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living, Chapter 10. Commentaries on verses 10-22.

Suggested Passage for Meditation

The Bhagavad Gita, “The Eternal Godhead” from *God Makes the Rivers to Flow*.

Weekly Lesson Plan**Lesson One**

In this month’s lessons we will explore the connection between the way we see the world and our state of mind. In this talk, Sri Easwaran says that meditation can help us have a mind so filled with peace that no discord with other people can upset us: “You always know that this is the home in which all of us live as children of God.” One way to start cultivating this capacity is to direct our attention to what is best in others, thus reducing our agitation while at the same time encouraging them to rise to their highest potential.

In answering these questions, please keep your focus on the practice of the Eight Point Program and don’t let your reflections or discussion get distracted by the details of situations you are personally involved in.

Reflect on these questions: Have you noticed the mind’s tendency to dwell on the negative aspects of a situation or person? Why do you think this happens? How have you used the Eight Points, and especially the Mantram, Slowing Down, and One-Pointed Attention, to redirect your attention to what is best in others? Which one of the points might you practice more intensely this week (and in what way?) to try to improve your ability to see the best in others?

When it’s time for inspiration, watch the first talk on this tape, *The Source of Inner Peace*, which is 33 minutes long. If you are not using the videotapes, please start reading from Chapter 10 of *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, Volume Two. Conclude with thirty minutes of meditation.

Lesson Two

This week we are continuing to explore the connection between how we see life and the degree of peace we feel within ourselves. Last week we reflected on the mind’s tendency to dwell on negative things, and we gave thought to ways in which we can dwell on the positive. This week we’ll look at the effect of these different modes of seeing life.

Questions for Reflection

a.) Consider this proposition: When we have a negative attitude we're uncomfortable about ourselves; when we have a positive attitude, we are peaceful, serene, comfortable.

Please discuss – does this match your experience?

b.) Often when we fall into a negative state of mind, we are unaware that it's happened.

But maybe we can develop our own personal "negativity-alert-system."

*What are some of your personal symptoms of being in a negative frame of mind? (examples – irritability, making critical remarks about others, dwelling on bad stuff happening in current events, whining, being sarcastic.)

*When you notice these symptoms in yourself, what Eight Point Program strategies can you use to change to a more positive outlook?

When it's time for inspiration, please read from Chapter 10 of *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, Volume Two. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

Lesson Three

For the past two weeks we've considered ways to see the original goodness in others. This week and next we'll concentrate on seeing it in ourselves.

In this week's video talk, Sri Easwaran speaks of the mantram as an effective method for remembering that God, the Divine Spirit, dwells within all creatures. One of the times when that is most difficult to remember is when we feel regret or frustration about a negative quality in ourselves.

Take five minutes (no more than that!) to reflect and choose a character trait about yourself – a habit or tendency – that you would like to change for the better. Reflect on what would be the corresponding positive quality. For instance, if you've chosen a tendency to be quick to anger, the corresponding positive might be patience. If you've chosen a tendency to be stubborn and self-willed, the corresponding positive might be relaxed and flexible. Once you've chosen a positive quality, write it at the top of a page and write the mantram for five minutes. (*It is important to follow these directions carefully, and not to spend more than five minutes in identifying a trait you wish to change in yourself. After that, devote all your attention and will power to concentrating on the corresponding positive quality.*)

Reflection: From Sri Easwaran's point of view (from the perspective of original goodness), the positive quality you've chosen is already within you, though it may now be partially obscured. During the coming week, how might you practice the Eight Points more fully, to display the positive quality you've chosen at every opportunity?

When it's time for inspiration, please watch the second of the two talks on this tape, *Remembering God Everywhere*, which is 32 minutes long. If you're not using the videos, please continue to read Chapter 10 of *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

Lesson Four

This week we complete our lessons on the connection between inner peace and seeing the best in others and ourselves.

At the conclusion of last week's videotaped talk, Sri Easwaran compared the mantram to skin lotions, saying that we should be as assiduous in protecting our mind from negativity as we are in protecting our skin from ultraviolet radiation. "Wherever we live, we can so protect the mind that we will not be affected by other people's animosities or other people's criticism or other people's opposition and we will be able to serve them and help them whatever their attitudes may be towards us."

Reflection: When Sri Easwaran talks about protecting the mind in this way, he is not talking about protecting it against other people, but from the agitation and animosity that arises in response to difficult situations. How might you use the mantram to protect yourself in this way? How might you remember the mantram more quickly when faced with such situations? How might you treat those situations not as threats but as opportunities for deeper effort?

When it's time for inspiration, please continue reading from Chapter 10 of *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*. Conclude with 30 minutes of meditation.

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