

REMAKING OURSELVES TO FULFILL OUR DESTINY

By Eknath Easwaran



*He who binds to himself a joy
Doth the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in Eternity's Sunrise*

William Blake

Leadership Development teaches us that there is a deep abiding significance to remaking ourselves to most fully align with our core values. The essential reason for us remaking ourselves into the people we want is to be able to help the animals, those around us and the whole global family live better lives. We also want to feel as if our work and life is giving something of value to the world.

We want to be capable of shaping ourselves into the person that we want to be. When we cast out a vision for a better world, we can learn how to step into that new world through becoming that capable person. We need to extend our reach in order to touch and connect with our vision. As we stretch and grow, we can feel something reaching back to us that helps us move forward. Our vision gently draws us into that healthier future that we envision. We gently release old habits and beliefs that prevent our future vision from being manifest.

Eknath Easwaran eloquently teaches that we have this native drive to reshape ourselves into the very best that we can be as human beings. He is talking to us as if he intimately knows us as human beings caught by our habits and conditioning. He lets us know that the practice of meditation can literally reshape us into the fuller stature of who we want to become. Let's listen to what he has to say.

Karla Boyd

The obvious joy comes in our realizing that we all can make the changes in ourselves that we want. We all can contribute more directly to the welfare of all around us. We all can reach our goals. It requires the small price of our investment in the process of remaking and transforming ourselves.

“Like a ball batted back and forth,” says an ancient text called the Yogabindu Upanishad, “a human being is batted back and forth by two forces within: one, the upward drive to evolve into spiritual beings; the other, the fierce downward thrust of our past conditioning as separate, self-oriented, physical creatures.”

During the past twenty-five years, I must have heard the same refrain from hundreds of people, particularly those who are young: “I don’t like myself.” The unspoken assumption is, “This is the kind of person I am, and it’s what I always will be. If I have crippling fears, the best I can do is learn to live with them. If I am prone to fits of anger, people will just have to accept me as I am.”

But we can change. No one needs to ever feel resigned and say, “There is nothing we can do.” That is the purpose and power of that upward force within us. If we turn inward we can remake ourselves completely, modeling ourselves in the image of the loftiest spiritual ideal we can conceive.

Built into our very nature is an inner drive that will not let us be satisfied with living at our lowest level, governed only by biological laws. Some inner evolutionary imperative is constantly exhorting us to grow, to reach for the highest that we can conceive, as if nature itself will not let us rest with anything less than spiritual fulfillment.

The other day Christine was showing me some old photographs taken when the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation was in its infancy. Two or three of those young faces we had not seen for years. Others, no longer young, were as close as the path outside our window, where a group of volunteers was working diligently at patching old asphalt. To a detached eye, the contrast was almost amusing. “Look at this picture,” I said, “and then look out there. Where did all that hair go?” But those were only physical changes. Much more importantly—and deeply gratifying—were the changes I knew these friends had wrought in their thinking processes over many years of meditation. Many of them had learned to transform anger into sympathy, impatience into patience, resentment into love; not perfectly, not always, but they knew how to do it, and they knew that it could be done. What could be more exhilarating?

These are the changes any one of us can learn to make. If you can be secure where you were insecure, selfless where you were selfish, if you can respect people around you even if they don’t like you and you don’t like them, then I will say with joy, “Yes. You really have changed.”

Remember the Buddha’s words: “All that we are is the result of what we have thought.” If our thinking is based on stimulus and response, he is trying to tell us, then most of us live like puppets, moved by patterns of thinking built up over years of repetition. These habits of mind cause us to say and do certain things habitually. They motivate our actions and mouth our words, and we just go along.

When we lose our temper, for example, it is as if anger were a puppet master, sticking two fingers up into our head and stimulating all the old control centers to make us move. “Start fussing and fuming now! You know how. Remember?” When we act on these angry impulses, we are adding to our habitual angry response. After a time, we have precious little choice in how we respond to the frustrations of everyday life. Someone gets in our way and we can’t help exploding. It is not as if we choose to get angry. Anger—what yoga psychology calls the anger samskara—is making decisions for us.

The same mechanism is at work in all our rigid, conditioned, emotional reactions—resentment, jealousy, lust, anxiety, greed, self-will, and their hundred and one relations. We would be amazed if we could look below the surface level of consciousness and see how many of our problems are caused by these deep-seated habits of thinking. This is a distressing sight, but it serves a vital purpose: it fires the desire to rise once and for all above the tyranny of the mind.

How can we do this? Is it possible not to be batted back and forth between spiritual and physical demands? Yes, the mystics answer with one voice, it is possible. We can learn to make every response a matter of free choice. If we can ally all our personal efforts with the upward drive of evolution, it will carry us beyond the reach of physical conditioning to a state where love, resourcefulness, and vitality are spontaneous and free.

“In the river of life,” says another ancient yoga text, “two currents flow in opposite directions. One, on the surface, flows toward sorrow, toward sickness, toward bondage. The other, beneath it, flows toward happiness, health, and freedom.” This may be fantastic hydrodynamics, but it illustrates our predicament perfectly. If we stay on the surface and do nothing, this image suggests, life will still take us somewhere—but not where we want to go. Staying in one place is not an option. To catch the deep current that leads to freedom, we have to swim and swim hard, against the flow of everyday conditioned response.

“All that we are is the result of what we have thought.” How does the mind become conditioned? By thinking the same thoughts over and over. To get free, we have only to think opposite thoughts over and over. That is why the Buddha called his way of life *patisotagami*: “swimming against the current” of selfish living, in order to merge at last in the flow of love that is our real nature.

In all of us, the nervous system is conditioned to strict one-way traffic: toward what we like and away from what we do not like. Any attempt to drive against this traffic brings a cry of protest from body and mind. This reaction is only natural; it is part of our biological inheritance. But pleasure and pain are part of life. Often we find it necessary to do something unpleasant or forgo something pleasant for the sake of a higher goal. At such times we need the full cooperation of our body and mind, a nervous system that can face life’s challenges without complaint. This is not merely spiritual living. It is the essence of a stress-proof personality, which everyone in our modern world needs. Our usual response, however, is to cling to things we like as if they could last forever, and without realizing it, we cling to things we dislike too. When someone says something objectionable we comment to ourselves, “I don’t like that person.” And we keep on saying it, despite all the other things he or she may say or do; we can’t let go. “This is just a momentary touch of unpleasantness,” Sri Krishna would say. “Why get excited over it? Don’t give it any more attention than you would a tepid bath.”

N A M A S T E G L O B A L V I S I O N

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Years ago, when my wife and I were looking at old houses, we came across a once-gracious garden with an ancient marble fountain so clogged with rubbish that not a drop of water could get through. You don't just give up such foundations for lost. With a lot of cleaning, you can get the water to start playing again. Then grass and flowers will grow around it, and the birds will come there to have their bath; it will grace the garden with its beauty.

It is the same with personality. To remake ourselves, we don't have to bring goodness, love, fearlessness, and the like and stuff them all in somehow. They are already present in us, deep in our consciousness; that is why we can never really rest content with being anything less. If we work to remove the impediments that have built up over the many years of biological conditioning, to dislodge all the old resentments and fears and selfish desires, love will flow from us like a fountain, and those we live and work with will come to us to be refreshed.

Of all that is wonderful in the human being, our most glorious asset is this capacity to change ourselves. Nothing is more significant.



From *Conquest of Mind*, by Eknath Easwaran, founder of the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation
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