

## THE BIG IDEAS

### Meditation Training

And its rewards.

### Stick-to-itiveness

It's a good quality to have.

### Effort, Energy & Stamina

Hard-working peeps plz apply.

### All Life is Yoga

Tear down the temple walls!

### A Panorama of Goodness

See it in people who bug you.

### Miracles

Created by hard work.

### The War Within

We're in it till we win it.

### The Capacity to Change

We have it. Let's rock it.

### Consistently Rocks

Seriously.

### Heroes at the Beginning

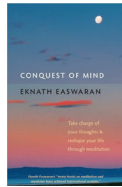
... And the ending, please.

### Love the Whole World

Make \*that\* your challenge.

### The Challenge

You up for it?



# Conquest of Mind

Take Charge of Your Thoughts and Reshape Your Life Through Meditation

BY EKNATH EASWARAN · NILGIRI PRESS © 2010 · 224 PAGES

“But we can change. No one need ever feel resigned and say, “There is nothing I can do.” There is everything we can do. That is the purpose and the power of that persistent 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.”

~ Eknath Easwaran from *Conquest of Mind*

[Eknath Easwaran](#) is one of my favorite teachers and this book is incredible.

Reading his books and watching his videos, you can tell he was an extraordinary human being and he kinda reminds me of an Indian Joseph Campbell--so full of life and wisdom and passion to inspire people to fully live.

To put his awesomeness in perspective, Huston Smith, the preeminent religious scholar, says this about Easwaran and his translations of the [Bhagavad Gita](#) and [The Dhammapada](#) (which we use for our PhilosophersNotes, btw): “No one in modern times is more qualified - no, make that ‘as qualified’ - to translate the epochal Classics of Indian Spirituality than Eknath Easwaran. And the reason is clear. It is impossible to get to the heart of those classics unless you live them, and he did live them. My admiration of the man and his works is boundless.”

To say [Conquest of the Mind](#) is packed with wisdom would be understatement. It's \*amazing\* and I think I highlighted pretty close to the whole thing on my Kindle. Seriously. If Easwaran's beautiful, powerful and inspiring words resonate with you like they do for me, I think you'll \*really\* enjoy this book (and his translations of the *Gita* and *Dhammapada*!).

Selecting the Big Ideas I want to share with you here was a challenge, but let's get on it!

## THE REWARDS OF MEDITATION TRAINING

“Whenever I describe the mechanics of meditation in this book, I will always be referring to the method I teach, which I have practiced myself for many decades. It is essentially the training of attention. The technique is simple but far from easy. It requires effort, and - like athletic conditioning - it can be quite strenuous. Its purpose is not to attain some remarkable experience during meditation but to master the thinking process. The rewards, therefore, come during the rest of the day. As your meditation deepens, you will find yourself stronger and more resilient, better able to face the challenges of life as the kind of person you would like to be: loving, creative, resourceful, and full of vitality.”

Let's kick this off by recognizing two very important points about meditation.

First, we've gotta realize it's *simple but not easy*. Effective meditation requires the same level of diligent training as athletic conditioning and if we're expecting quick, effortless results we're in trouble. We've gotta show up and put our best in day in and day out. Then, over the long run, we'll see awesome results.

Second, we gotta know it's NOT about the feelings/experiences we have \*during\* the meditation.

“I can tell my hand what to do,” Augustine once observed, “and it obeys. Why can't I do the same with my mind?”

~ Eknath Easwaran

*“All that we are,” the Buddha said, “is the result of what we have thought.” He might have added, “And all we shall become is the result of what we think now.”*

~ Eknath Easwaran

It’s about who we are during the rest of the day--which is hopefully a much more loving, creative, resourceful and vital human being! Too many people get all geeked up about the ephemeral transcendent experiences they have (or don’t have) while meditating and make attaining *those* states their goal.

Um, not so much. As Easwaran says, the whole point of meditation is to influence the type of person we are during the rest of our day. As he says: **“Meditation is warm-up exercise for the mind, so that you can jog through the rest of the day without getting agitated or spraining your patience.”**

Love that. Are you spraining your patience/kindness/love muscles?

Well, here’s to warming-up *every* AM!! :) )

## STICK-TO-ITIVENESS

**“In every fitness program, of course, it is stick-to-itiveness that counts. You get nowhere if you exercise by fits and starts. Don’t go out one day and do a lot of exercises, then get depressed the next day, go to bed, and skip the program completely. Keep on exercising, whether it feels good or not. That is how you develop a fit will and a svelte, attractive personality.”**

That’s awesome.

Reminds me of [Michael Beckwith](#) in his great book [Spiritual Liberation](#) (see Notes) where he says: *“The gift of self-discipline is that it has the power to take you beyond the reasoning of temporary emotion to freedom. Think of how empowered you’ve felt on occasions when you haven’t given in to the ‘I don’t feel like it’ syndrome and honored your commitment to yourself. What does not feeling like it have to do with it? The combination of love for something with the willingness to do what it takes to practice it—discipline—results in freedom.”*

I absolutely LOVE this line: *“What does not feeling like it have to do with it?”*

Hah. Think of that the next time you don’t \*feel\* like meditating, working out, creating, being kind/patient/loving, etc.

Live your highest values. Show up. Day in and day out. Diligently, patiently, persistently, and playfully flex your stick-to-itiveness muscles! That’s pretty much the magical formula, eh?

So, let’s not let whether we “feel” like it or not to get in the way of shaping ourselves into the highest visions of our souls, yo!

## EFFORT, ENERGY & STAMINA

**“This may sound odd, because intense activity is generally motivated toward goals that are just the opposite of spiritual. But over the years I have made a rather surprising observation: the person who is relaxed, easygoing, “laid back,” may not be a good candidate for meditation. Such people simply may not be willing to put forth the effort required to make difficult changes in personality, or have the energy and the stamina to keep going when the going gets rough. To go far in meditation, we need to rouse all the energy we can muster and then channel it all toward one overriding goal.”**

As you can probably tell by this point, Easwaran is an intense guy and he’s adamant about the fact that we’ve gotta bring a high level of energy and commitment to our meditation practice if we expect to see results.

[Geshe Michael Roache](#) tells us pretty much the same thing in his great book [The Diamond Cutter](#) (see Notes) where he integrates the ideals of Buddhism into business. He says: *“Never accept the idea that, because you are in business, you don’t have the opportunity or time or personal qualities which a true spiritual life demands, or that maintaining a deep inner life is somehow*

*"In small matters like these, gradually the mind can be effectively trained. At home, in meditation, at work, in moments of relaxation with family and friends, we can go against the conditioned caprices of the mind and gain, little by little, control of something which often seems nebulous and elusive: our own destiny."*

~ Eknath Easwaran

contradictory with leading a business career. The wisdom of *The Diamond Cutter* says that the very people who are attracted to business are exactly the ones who have the inner strength to grasp and carry out the deeper practices of the spirit."

Why? Because goal-driven business peeps "have drive and they have the ability to do what must be done to get something done, as no one else does."

So, if you're laid back and think results should just manifest (ahem, I really dislike that word :), you might want to turn your diligence up a notch or three. And, if you're a hard-driving goal-achieving kinda guy or gal, know that you've got what it takes to rock it. In any case, get on it!

## ALL LIFE IS YOGA

"Sri Aurobindo, one of twentieth-century India's most luminous figures, has a good motto for reminding us of this: "All life is yoga." Every moment, he means, is an opportunity for training the mind."

Makes me jump up and say "YES!" (I'm a little excitable like that. :)

As Easwaran instructs us, EVERY MOMENT is an opportunity for training the mind. Take that literally. Because he means Every. Single. Moment.

Again, it's silly to imagine our 10 or 15 or 30 or 60 minutes of daily meditation as our complete practice. That's just the warm-up!

For what? For LIFE. Our AM meditation gives us a little warm up so, when faced with that aggressive driver on the freeway or impatient colleague at work or uber-exuberant (aka loud) kid at home we can put our practice into action--stepping in between the stimulus and habitual response and, instead, choosing our most empowered response.

This idea also reminds me of a gem from [Genpo Roshi's \*Big Mind Big Heart\*](#) (see Notes) where he tells us: "We're at the point in our evolution that we all have to become conscious. This is a time of revolution. There's no holding back. So I'm about tearing down the monastery walls and seeing the whole world as the monastery, as the practice, as the spiritual temple. What we're all working on is this very being, this very life. This is the temple, it has no walls."

Can I get an "Amen!" to that?!?

## A PANORAMA OF GOODNESS

*"The first strategy is literally "changing one thought for another": a negative thought for a positive one, an unkind thought for a kind one.*

*"Just as a carpenter uses a small peg to drive out a bigger one," the Buddha says, "you can use a right thought to drive out one that is wrong."*

~ Eknath Easwaran

"To give one small illustration, whenever somebody is unkind to me, I can immediately unroll the panorama of that person's good qualities. Instantly the balance is set right. As with most skills, this is a matter of practice. When you are having trouble getting along with someone, a simple first step is to sit down quietly and recall how many times that person has given you support. You are using positive memories to drive out negative ones before they have a chance to crowd together and form a mob, which is all resentment really is."

Easwaran has all kinds of ideas on how we can train our minds throughout the day--using every experience as another opportunity to grow. This is one of my favorites.

You having challenges with someone and obsessing on their negative qualities? Try swapping out the negative with a "panorama of that person's good qualities"!!!

## MIRACLES AND HARD WORK

"This is a miraculous achievement, but there is no miracle about how it is accomplished. It requires a lot of hard work. When your meditation is progressing well, if your mind goes into a negative mood - about yourself, about your problems, about other people, about the state of the world - you should be able to switch your attention away from the negative and focus it on

*"Hard work is absolutely necessary for excellence in any field, and nothing requires more intense effort than meditation."*

~ Eknath Easwaran

the positive. By doing this over and over again, you can reach a state in which negative thoughts cannot even appear on the scene. Then your behavior is always kind, your words are always helpful, and your life becomes a positive influence on all."

Again, this is what it's all about: The hard work required to transform our consciousness such that we can switch our attention away from the negative and focus it on the positive.

You working hard? :)

## THE WAR WITHIN

"Whatever romantic notions we may have about spiritual growth, it never really happens in a short time. Like the Thirty Years' War, this war within goes on and on. There is so much to transform! Naturally there come times when the mind gets tired and complains. "Why not call it off for a while?" This cannot be done. Once we come face to face with a samskara in deeper consciousness, we are in the ring with it until we win. As my grandmother used to tell me, "The Lord will never put on your shoulders even one pound more than you can bear. But, "she would always add, "you will never have to carry one pound less, either." Otherwise we would not grow."

Powerful stuff.

We're in it till we win it. And, remember: "The Lord will never put on your shoulders even one pound more than you can bear. But, "she would always add, "you will never have to carry one pound less, either.""

How else are we gonna grow? :)

## THE CAPACITY TO CHANGE

*"Just as there are certain exercises for toning a particular set of muscles, there are special exercises for developing a fit personality. Every provocation is an exercise for developing patience; every opportunity to retaliate offers a chance to harness your passions. The question is the same as in a physical fitness program: how much do you want to get in shape?"*

~ Eknath Easwaran

"Of all that is wonderful in the human being, our most glorious asset is this capacity to change ourselves. Nothing is more significant. I admire the achievements of science, but I do not feel intimidated by the current conviction that we are what our genes are. My body is what my genes make it, but my character and behavior are not fixed by my genetic code. As proof we have the lives of great men and women of all religions who have thrown these claims to the winds with their personal transformations - from angry to compassionate, from insecure to unshakable, from human to divine. The message of their lives echoes down the corridors of time to those who have ears to hear: "You are not what your body is. Your real nature is spirit, which nothing can diminish or deny." Whatever our past, whatever our present, all of us have the capacity to change ourselves completely through the practice of meditation."

We CAN change our character and therefore our lives! Period.

Reminds me of William James who said: "The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind."

The question is, quite simply, how much do you want it?

Interesting side note: When Easwaran wrote these words, the scientific community was still stuck on the idea that our physical bodies were pretty much independent from our minds and that our genes were fixed.

We now know that meditation and other mind body practices actually *change the expression of our genetic code*--influencing our health and physical well-being in ways Easwaran and others of his era didn't imagine. Check out our Note on [Herbert Benson's](#) brilliant book [The Relaxation Revolution](#) for a quick look at the stunning scientific research that demonstrates the fact that as little as 12-15 minutes of daily meditation over 8 weeks can actually change the expression of hundreds of our genes. Incredibly cool.

*"Today, everything I do from morning meditation on-- eating breakfast, going for a walk, writing, reading, even recreation--is governed by one purpose only: how to give the very best account of my life that I can in the service of all."*

~ Eknath Easwaran

*"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."*

~ Eknath Easwaran

## CONSISTENCY ROCKS

**"Nothing you can do will strengthen your determination more than the regular practice of meditation: at the same time, and for the full length of time, every single day."**

Might want to read that again and take it literally. Nothing sexy to showing up at the same time Every. Single. Day., but that's what it's all about. Again, I repeat: It's not about fancy techniques and rockin' postures. It's about showing up. Every day.

Are you?

(P.S. Same rules apply in your relationship, your health, your work. :)

## HEROES AT THE BEGINNING

**"In Sanskrit we have a word which means "heroes at the beginning": people who take up a job with a fanfare of trumpets but soon find that their enthusiasm has tiptoed down the back stair. Those who go far in meditation are the ones who keep on plugging. They may not be very spectacular; they may never hear a trumpet. But they keep on trying day in and day out, giving their best in every situation and relationship, never giving up. Such people are bound to reach their goal."**

O.M.G. Love that.

Reminds me of [Russell Simmons](#)' genius line from his equally awesome book [Do You!](#) (see Note): *"Focus on your vision and keep going until you hit the finish line. Don't be one of the people who believe in their vision at first but then give up. See it through, no matter how long it takes. Understand that obstacles are just part of the game. Whatever you imagine, you can achieve. Once you realize this truth, no one is going to be able to stop you."*

(Side note: You might not've known it, but in addition to being the Godfather of hip-hop, Simmons is also a devoted vegan yogi who tells us: *"I'm just suggesting that when you're faced with fear and anxiety, don't medicate. Meditate instead."*)

Also reminds me of some wisdom from one of my old mentors, Steve Wynne (not the Vegas guy but the former CEO of adidas!). Quick context: I was a 25-year-old CEO of an internet company I co-founded called eteamz. We'd won the biz plan competition at UCLA, raised \$5m and hired 45 employees when we decided to find a grown-up to run the biz. Long story a little shorter, we got lucky and hired Steve to be our CEO right when the dot com bubble popped in 2000.

In the process of struggling to meet payrolls and figuring out how we were going to make everything work, I VIVIDLY remember Steve telling me: *"It's not how you start something, it's how you finish it."* I actually get tears in my eyes as I type that and remember the challenges of those weeks/months and how often I felt like giving up--at which point those words would echo in my head and I'd get back to work on creating the best possible outcome. (Which for us was selling the biz to one of our competitors who had raised \$50m to our \$5m. eteamz now serves 3+ million teams from nearly every country in the world.)

Finally, we can't talk about being a hero in the beginning without referencing [George Leonard's Mastery](#) (see Notes). If you haven't read the book yet, please put it on your "will do!" list. For now, we'll soak this up: *"We fail to realize that mastery is not about perfection. It's about a process, a journey. The master is the one who stays on the path day after day, year after year. The master is the one who is willing to try, and fail, and try again, for as long as he or she lives."*

And now for the most important part: How 'bout you? You starting off strong on stuff (whether it's your meditation practice or creative projects or relationships or whatever) and then sneaking out the back door?



*"A beautiful prayer from the ancient Hindu scriptures echoes in my heart always: "May all creatures be happy. May people everywhere live in abiding peace and love." For all of us are one, and joy can be found only in the joy of all."*

~ Eknath Easwaran

## LOVE THE WHOLE WORLD

"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."

How's that for a vision?!

Super inspired by the image of being launched beyond superficial living like a missile and loving the whole world as a mother loves her only child...

Are you up for the challenge?

## LIVING UP TO THE CHALLENGE

"To fail to live up to this challenge, my spiritual teacher used to say, is simply being irresponsible. This is not asking for perfection but merely expecting us to do our best to grow. If we do not do this much, we are depriving life of a contribution that only we can make. Spiritual living is responsible living. I am responsible not only for myself but for all of you, just as all of you are responsible for each other and for me."

Beautiful.

Here's to living up to the challenge and giving our highest selves to the world, my friend!

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Chief Philosopher*

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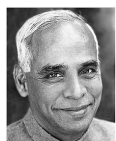
[Big Mind Big Heart](#)

[Mastery](#)

[Do You!](#)

## About the Author of "Conquest of Mind"

EKNATH EASWARAN



Eknath Easwaran (December, 1910 – October 26, 1999) was born in a village in Kerala, India. He served as Professor of English Literature at the University of Nagpur, and was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley. His translations of the "Bhagavad Gita," the "Upanishads," and the "Dhammapada" are critically acclaimed.

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at [brianjohnson.me](http://brianjohnson.me).