



Becoming Master Artists, by Eknath Easwaran

We do not have to accept ourselves as we are. Genetic code or brain bio-chemistry, astrological configurations or Tarot readings, early traumas or upbringing- none of these can ever limit our potential. The Buddha explains, "All that we are is the result of what we have thought." By changing the very mode of our thinking, we can remake ourselves completely.

Then we become master artists. It is no small thing to compose a sonata or write a perceptive novel; we are indebted to the great composers and writers who have given us beauty and insight into human nature. But I am most moved by the beauty of the perfectly crafted life, where every bit of selfishness has been carved away and what is thought, felt, said, and done are brought into harmony.

It takes time and sustained effort to fashion such a life. That is the challenge of it (meditation)- and that is why it (meditation) can appeal so deeply to people with a skeptical streak, who simply cannot take seriously the claims for instant transformation put forth today. They know you cannot reverse long-standing attitudes and habits by signing up for an "enlightenment weekend," any more than you can sit down at a piano and play Beethoven or Chopin after learning to locate middle C.

For most of us, conditioning habits of thinking, feeling, and acting- flows through our days like a powerful river. Understandably, we usually lie back and float downstream. When a river of anger rises, for example, it is so easy, so apparently satisfying, to let it carry us along. Just try swimming against it! Your teeth will chatter, your breathing will become labored, your legs will grow weak. But the spiritual life requires that we do just that: reverse our conditioning and swim upstream, like salmon returning home.

In India, when the monsoons come, the clouds gush torrents of rain for days, causing the rivers to flood and swell. Many of the boys of my village were strong swimmers and daring too. We tested ourselves by leaping into the churning waters and trying to swim straight across to the far shore. It might take an hour or more to fight one's way across, and even then only a few heroes made it to the precise spot; most of us ended up hundreds of yards below. But everyone loved the challenge.

You may be saying, "I am not sure I can do this." Everyone can do this. It is in our nature; it is what we were born for. By virtue of being human, all of us have the capacity to choose, to change, to grow.

