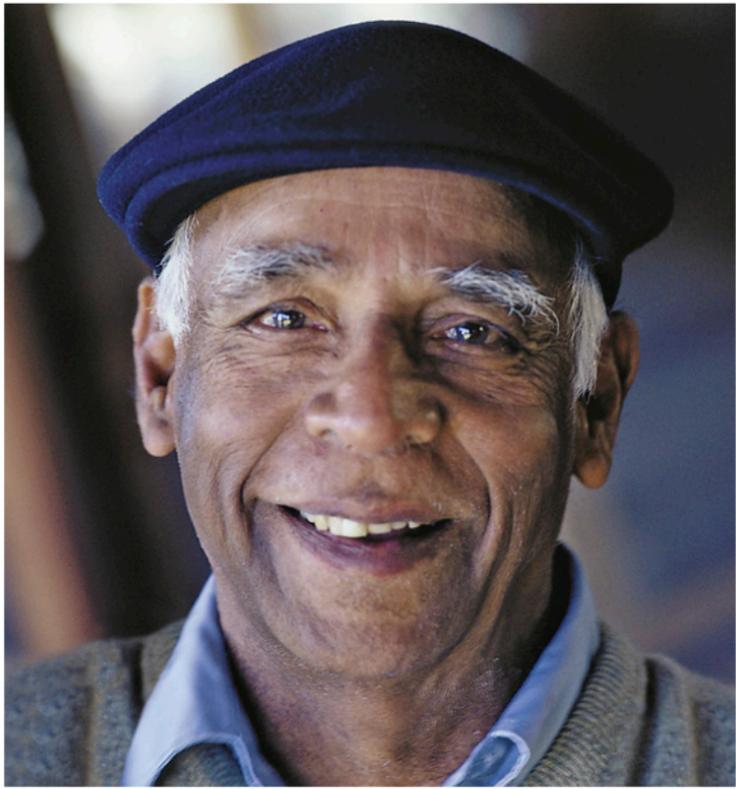


Eknath Easwaran on Meditation & Spiritual Living

Blue Mountain Journal

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The Long Journey of Evolution

In This Issue

“Life,” Easwaran writes, can be viewed as “a journey over billions of years: the great chain of being, a kind of spiritual evolution in which consciousness emerges from inanimate matter through eons of biological experimentation.”

In our first two articles, Easwaran describes this journey through the Bhagavad Gita’s far-reaching theory of the three *gunas*, or qualities: *tamas*, inertia; *rajas*, energy; and *sattva*, law. When applied to our daily lives, Easwaran notes, this ancient theory “becomes practical, compassionate psychology,” confirming our capacity and evolutionary duty, as human beings, “to take our destiny as individuals into our own hands, and thereby help guide life to its fullest potential.”

In the third article, Easwaran illustrates this journey with the image of ascending a mountain, from the dusty plains of India to his beloved Blue Mountain. At the summit, we reach our native state, the state to which we have been striving “through the long travail of evolution” to return.

This issue also includes practical suggestions from Easwaran and community members on applying these concepts in daily life, so we can move forward on our own spiritual journey.

– The BMCM Editorial Team

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The Goal of Human Evolution

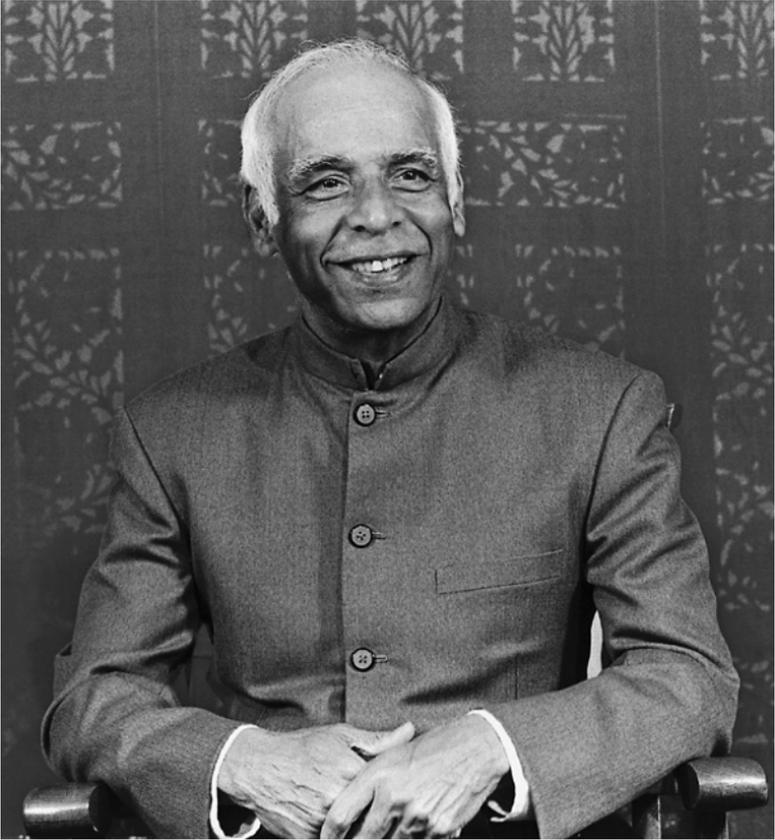
Ekknath Easwaran, from *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*

The practice of meditation has been described marvelously as taking our evolution into our own hands. Instead of waiting for the forces of evolution to buffet us for the next million years and make us selfless, we say, “Let me try during this very life to take my destiny in my hands and, by working at my life day in and day out, remove every particle of selfishness from my consciousness so that I may become aware of the unity of life.”

*

We need not be born under Capricorn, or live in the Golden Age, to attain the supreme goal. In any age, any context, we can, through the practice of meditation, realize the unity of life and fulfill the goal of human evolution. No matter what context we find ourselves in, what *samskaras* [conditioned ways of thinking] we labor under, or what our horoscope may read, we can always redirect our lives to the goal, because our Atman, or real personality, is eternal, immutable, and infinite.





Easwaran, 1970s

The Long Journey of Evolution

Ekknath Easwaran, from *Essence of the Bhagavad Gita*

Ever since human beings began telling tales around the evening fire, I imagine, life has been compared with a journey – a poignant image that no one has portrayed more vividly than the Persian poet and mathematician Omar Kháyyám, whose *Rubáiyát* has been a favorite of mine since I discovered the English versions of Edward FitzGerald in my teens. It was only much later that a Muslim friend revealed to me the Sufi symbolism so easily misunderstood in a worldly reading. The poet compares life on earth with a caravanserai, a travelers' waystation on the long journey of the soul towards God:

Think, in this battered Caravanserai
Whose Portals are alternate Night and Day,
 How Sultán after Sultán with his Pomp
Abode his destin'd Hour, and went his way.
One Moment in Annihilation's Waste,
One Moment, of the Well of Life to taste –
 The Stars are setting and the Caravan
Starts for the Dawn of Nothing – Oh, make haste!
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly – and Lo! the Bird is on the Wing.

A long, long ascent

The Gita extends this metaphor to the beginning and end of time. Life is a journey over billions of years: the great chain

of being, a kind of spiritual evolution in which consciousness emerges from inanimate matter through eons of biological experimentation. At the human level comes the capacity for fully unconditioned awareness and Self-realization. In this way, from the lowest form of life upwards, each creature may be seen as trying to project itself into a higher level of life.

On this scale the human being is the “roof and crown” of creation, but not in the sense the Victorian poets meant. We have not inherited dominion over nature, the Gita would say, but have evolved to the responsibility of trusteeship for ourselves and the rest of life. We have the capacity, and therefore the evolutionary duty, to take our destiny as individuals into our own hands, and thereby help guide life to its fullest potential. *Homo sapiens* represents a stage in evolution half-way between our biological nature and what we can become. We bear both the imprint of the biological level from which we have risen and the latent capacity to realize the full potential of this remarkable brain and mind with which we have been born – life after life, as we have seen, in a long, long ascent of spiritual growth.

We have a choice

From this point of view, any individual who lives mostly for satisfying the senses has barely risen above the animal level, where behavior is dictated by the senses and instincts.

*

That is why the Gita says that whatever sensory urge we are driven by, if we cannot control it – not suppress it, but simply have a say in it – we are living at the lowest end of our human

potential. Here is the war within again: either master the senses or be mastered by them.

According to the Gita, it is the same with anger: the moment we become angry, we have gone back to the animal level. The point is that as human beings, we have a choice. When somebody gets angry with us and we remain calm instead of retaliating, we have broken this link with the animal for the moment and risen a bit higher on our own personal ladder of evolution. Every human being has this choice in every circumstance, the Gita would say: either to remain at the animal level or to move towards fully human behavior by controlling anger, hatred, and violence.

This is a tall order, of course, but isn't this what great teachers like Jesus and the Compassionate Buddha have taught too? The difference – perhaps an appealing one today – is that the Gita does not present this as simply a moral choice and judge us when we fail in it. These choices are checkpoints on our evolutionary journey, opportunities to move away from what we have been conditioned to be and towards unconditioned freedom.

Tamas, rajas, and sattva

The Gita has a far-reaching theory behind this view. In the Gita's cosmology, remember, before the phenomenal world came into existence there was only undifferentiated consciousness – the indivisible, immutable reality that is our native state. As in modern cosmology, the process of creation began when the equilibrium of this state was disturbed, differentiating this primordial energy into three states called gunas: tamas, inertia; rajas, energy; and sattva, law. At the moment



Easwaran, 1970s

of creation these three modes began to interact, producing all kinds of combinations. Everything in the phenomenal world is an expression of these three gunas in different proportions, and evolution progresses from inertia through energy into law. Pure consciousness is still and undifferentiated, though full of limitless potential. Evolution is the process that can lead us back to that state.

In the Gita this is not merely philosophy. Applied to our daily lives, it becomes practical, compassionate psychology. Throughout nature all three gunas are constantly in play, with one or another predominant at any moment. Since body and mind are made of the same stuff, the gunas interact the same

way within personality too. The Gita summarizes all this in a series of verses:

It is the three gunas born of prakriti – sattva, rajas, and tamas – that bind the immortal Self to the body. Sattva – pure, luminous, and free from sorrow – binds us with attachment to happiness and wisdom. Rajas is passion, arising from selfish desire and attachment. These bind the Self with compulsive action. Tamas, born of ignorance, deludes all creatures through heedlessness, indolence, and sleep.

Sattva predominates when rajas and tamas are transformed. Rajas prevails when sattva is weak and tamas overcome. Tamas prevails when rajas and sattva are dormant.

When sattva predominates, the light of wisdom shines through every gate of the body. When rajas predominates, a person runs about pursuing selfish and greedy ends, driven by restlessness and desire. When tamas is dominant, a person lives in darkness – slothful, confused, and easily infatuated. (14:5–8, 10–13)

Tamas: inertia, resistance

We can see the dynamics of this theory by looking at ourselves. When we want to be of some service to those around us, when we forgive, when we find it difficult to nourish resentments or to carry a grudge, sattva is coming into play. At the opposite

pole is *tamas*: inertia, resistance. Everyone shows a streak of *tamas* when apathy starts its theme song: “Who cares? What does it matter? What does it matter if I finish this job? What does it matter if people get hurt? What does it matter if this isn’t legal? What does it matter if the world explodes?” This is the vocabulary of *tamas* on the human level, and “I don’t care” is its simplest form.

Tamas can show itself in other ways too. “This is too big a problem for me. This is too great a challenge. This world is too troubled for me to help; what can one person do?” Or simply, “I can’t do this” – which often means no more than “I don’t want to.” *Tamas* predominates in a person who is apathetic, who is insensitive to the suffering around him and just cannot make much effort. It is the insidious voice that whispers, “Drop out. Quit your job. Turn your back. Run away.” *Tamas* flourishes by paralyzing the will, the faculty we need most in personal growth.

Leap out of bed

In spiritual evolution, *tamas* is the aspect of mind that holds us back, and it will dog our progress at every level of consciousness. When we learn to deal with it on the physical level, it will retrench somewhere less obvious, such as procrastination, failure of the will, or paralysis when we have to do something we dislike. If we are doing our best in meditation, we will always be on the front lines of the struggle with *tamas*. Drowsiness in deeper meditation, for example, may be a sign that we have reached a frontier in consciousness and lack the will to push into unknown territory.

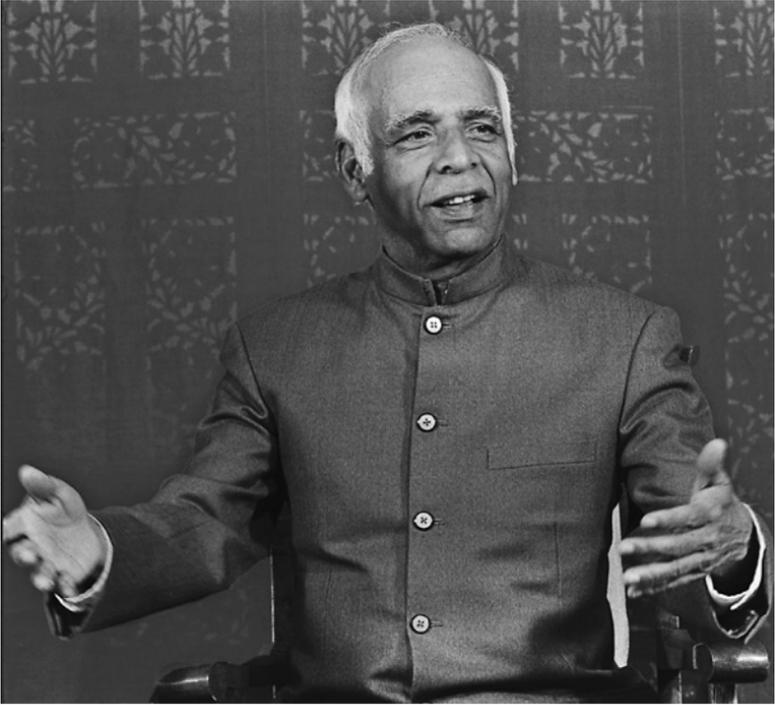
A mental block consists of *tamas*, and the human being

has an unending series of such impediments at every level of consciousness. One familiar sign that we are nearing a mental block – something we have to work through because tamas is rising – is that we can't seem to get up in the morning. This is a warning that tamas is gaining ascendance. The way to press through that resistance is not to weigh pros and cons, which only makes tamas stronger, but to throw off the covers and give one leap out of bed. It seems a small step, but life consists of small moments, and each time we resist an impulse to do nothing, we are transforming that block of inertia into energy: that is, transforming tamas into rajās.

A precious secret

Rajās is dominant whenever we feel active, energetic, full of drive and enterprise or driven by passion. Rajās enables us to get things done, but it is also the glue of attachment that gets us caught in the pursuit of personal pleasure, profit, prestige, or power. Uncontrolled, rajās runs amok – and when it won't let us rest, rajās is crying out that it is ready to be transformed into sattva. In that highest state, we are energetic without being driven by time or self-centered attachments. Wherever we find someone calm, clear, and kind under pressure, compassionate in the face of provocation, we can be sure that sattva is predominant.

The Gita is giving us a precious secret here: how to transform the lower levels of consciousness into the highest, where forgiveness, forbearance, compassion, and love come into play. In nature, the gunas interact mindlessly, but as human beings we can draw on the will, the higher mind, to change them as we



Easwaran, 1970s

choose. We can draw upon rajas to transform tamas, and then channel and harness rajas to transform it into sattva. When sattva predominates, all the energies of life are in balance. This is not the unitive state that yoga aims at, but sattva is the platform we must reach in order to move beyond the gunas altogether into unitary consciousness.

The direct result of rajas

We make this kind of progress only by degrees, but changes can be decisive. I remember a profile in the *New Yorker* of a man

named Theodore Taylor who, upon graduating from college in physics, proved to be a brilliant designer of nuclear weapons. He was a gentle, peace-loving chap; he merely happened to have a genius for making bombs.

As a young physicist in the heady years following the Manhattan Project, Ted Taylor found himself tantalized by the challenge of ballistics problems no one else could solve. He simply couldn't allow a second-rate bomb design to lie around without improving on it, even when an "elegant solution" meant a smaller, simpler device that could kill more people. "The worst invention in physical history," he admitted, "was also the most interesting." And he added an illuminating observation: "The theorist's world is a world of the best people and the worst of possible results." That is what *moha* [delusion, confusion] does, and it is the direct result of *rajas*.

Rajas to sattva

But this was a sensitive man who quickly began to think about the consequences of his work. Soon after his first daughter was born – no coincidence, he said – he turned exclusively to peacetime uses of atomic energy, and after a while he began warning anyone who would listen about the implications of miniaturized atomic weapons – not a new danger, but in this case people knew the warning came from a man who knew precisely how easily such a weapon could be made. In his latter years, I learned, he devoted himself to alternative energy technologies and had begun studying the Gita and learning to meditate – a perfect illustration of how *rajas* can be transformed into *sattva* in this life.

Powerhouses of creative activity

In this sense, evolution is the transformation of energy from one state into another, the way the power in a rushing river is converted into electrical energy by a water mill. If we think of *tamas* as ice, *rajas* is the energy in that block of ice released into flowing water when it melts, and *sattva* is the same energy conserved and harnessed when water is turned to steam to drive a turbine. The differences are only of “name and form.” This is a reassuring way to classify humanity, because it implies that no one need be stuck in any of these states. Just as ice can always be made into water and water can always be turned into steam and harnessed, even the most *tamas* individual can take up the spiritual life. It’s an apt illustration, because an incredible amount of energy is released when *tamas* is transformed. I have seen young people crippled by inertia become powerhouses of creative activity through the practice of meditation.

Back to Eden

In its native state, consciousness is a continuous flow of awareness. Creation is the fall from this state into fragmented, divided, sometimes stagnant awareness, which hides reality under the confused activity of the *gunas*. I like to think this is the significance of the Fall in the biblical account of creation. Eden is not a place but a state of consciousness, and the Fall is not an event that took place thousands of years ago but a process that is still continuing – about to hit bottom, perhaps, but still continuing. What we are trying to do in meditation is stop the fall and go back to Eden – reversing this decline

by resolving fragmentation back into unity, not in the physical world but in our mode of seeing.

A thrilling discovery

Roughly speaking, most of us have rajasic minds, which means we are thinking all the time, working all the time, without conscious control of what the mind is doing. That is rajas. The Gita would draw a distinction between conscious, voluntary, intentional thinking and mental activity that is involuntary, conditioned, and compulsive. In sattva, the workings of the mind come under conscious control, which means that most forms of unnecessary thinking – worrying, for example – simply disappear.

One of the most thrilling discoveries in sadhana is that we don't have to act on our states of mind. We don't even have to be affected by our states of mind. If we have negative thoughts – resentments, doubts, jealousies, fears – we don't have to act on any of them, and simply by not acting on negative thoughts, we start transforming the energy in them into sattva.

Rajas, then, is the ordinary mind, desiring, worrying, and resenting, scheming and competing, and getting more frustrated all the time. To the extent we are able to establish control over this, the mind becomes sattva. And the vast unconscious mind is tamas. It's just chaos. Most of us know how much clutter one person can accumulate in even a few years; our closets and garages bear witness. Imagine the amount of clutter your mind must have picked up in the course of a lifetime and multiply that over eons of lifetimes; that is the unconscious, the dumping-ground of evolution.



Easwaran, 1980s

Sattvic giving

The picture that tamas presents at this level is so overwhelming that I will draw a veil over it, except to say that this is the repository of immense power – power that hides a limitless treasury of resources that flow into our hands when we discover that power and harness it. Until then, however, it is just darkness, the literal meaning of tamas.

The pull of tamas from these depths keeps us swinging like a pendulum from guna to guna, unable to make lasting commitments or to be loyal. To give just one illustration, most people involved in selfless work have had someone come up and say with honest enthusiasm, “I want to help, and I have a lot of resources. Just tell me what you need.” Then, after a

week or two, the same person begins to find reservations and conditions. One month later, when you meet by chance, he will say sincerely, “You’re doing such good work! I wish you every success.”

The first of these instances is what the Gita calls sattvic giving, without any strings or expectations. The second is born of rajas: “Will you put my name on a plaque on the cornerstone, in beautiful calligraphy?” And the third, of course, is our old friend tamas. The Gita gives several such illustrations of how the gunas operate, and it is remarkably specific:

Giving simply because it is right to give, without thought of return, at the proper time, in proper circumstances, and to a worthy person, is sattvic giving. Giving with regrets or in the expectation of receiving some favor or of getting something in return is rajasic. Giving at an inappropriate time, in inappropriate circumstances, and to an unworthy person, without affection or respect, is tamasic. (17:20–22)

Unifying our desires

The way to steady the mind and transform these lower states into sattva is to stand firm in our highest resolutions and not let ourselves be pushed into acting on rajas or tamas. In this way, again, we are changing consciousness to be changeless – making the mind unshakable no matter what the forces and circumstances outside.

What is happening as we do this is fascinating: we are unifying consciousness by unifying our desires, which are expressions of rajas in a million different channels. Desire is

energy, like electricity; it can be harnessed or be drained away. In the earlier stages of personal evolution, desire is often sluggish; *tamas* rules, locking up the energy required to reach for a better life. As *rajas* rises, desires arise and multiply. A great many people live in this middle stage, with so many desires that there is little power in any of them. Seeking countless trivial things, often concerning personal appearance or prestige, they lead superficial lives, rarely achieving success in any field.

As experience deals out its lessons, however – perhaps over lifetimes – such people begin to focus their desires. They learn that having many small desires cannot bring fulfillment: at best, small desires bring only small satisfactions, stirring the desire for something that abides.

An overriding need to know

Those who are born with relatively few desires, by contrast, stand out for leading outwardly successful lives. They have focused the power of desire enough to accomplish what matters most. And a fortunate few are born with just two or three desires. They are the geniuses, the great scientists, athletes, humanitarians, musicians, artists, writers, statesmen, who make their mark in whatever field they choose. In that field they have harnessed *rajas*, though often not in the rest of their lives. But among them are a few who have made their lives shine. They have learned to transform the whole of personality into *sattva*, making their lives a work of art.

Last – rarest and most precious – come a handful who are possessed by only one desire: the overriding need to know who they are and what life is for. Out of this group come the



Ramagiri Ashram

great mystics. They have tasted what life has to offer, sampled what they can achieve through personal ambition, and found it all too small to satisfy them. The longing for Self-realization has become so gargantuan that it has consumed every lesser desire—for pleasure, for profit, for prestige, for power—as a raging river assimilates the creeks that drain into it.

In practical terms, this means that consciousness is very nearly unified: we are not pulled in different directions by competing forces; all our capacity to desire is focused on one end. Tamas and rajas are almost completely transformed, setting the stage for the unitive state. 🌸

The Mirror of Eternity

Saint Clare of Assisi

Place your mind before the mirror of eternity,
place your soul in the brightness of His glory,
place your heart in the image of the divine essence
and transform yourself by contemplation
utterly into the image of His divinity,
that you too may feel what His friends feel as they taste
the hidden sweetness that God himself has set aside
from the beginning for those who love Him.

Casting aside all things in this false and troubled world
that ensnare those who love them blindly,
give all your love to Him who gave Himself in all
for you to love:

Whose beauty the sun and moon admire, and whose gifts
are abundant and precious and grand without end.

Remembrance of God

Hasan al-Basri

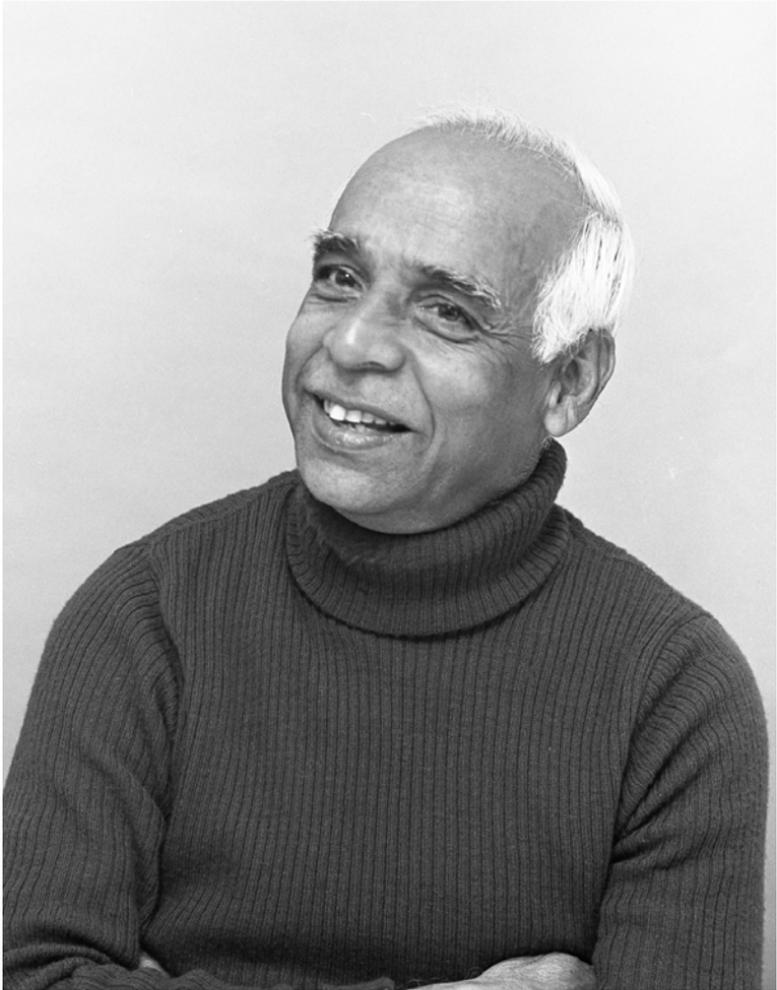
Those who are content, needing nothing,
and seek solitude in meditation will find peace.

Those who have trodden all selfish desires underfoot
will find freedom.

Those who have rid themselves of envy will find friendship.

Those who have patience, even for a little while,
will find themselves prepared for Eternity.

God has said: “When my servant becomes altogether occupied with me, repeating my Name, then I make his happiness consist in remembrance of me. And when I have made his happiness consist in the remembrance of me, he desires me and I desire him. And when he desires me and I desire him, I raise the veils between me and him and reveal myself before his eyes.”



Easwaran, 1970s

The Gunas, the Will, and Lifelong Learning

Eknath Easwaran, from *Essence of the Bhagavad Gita*

We know what a struggle it is to understand a school subject that seems alien. Tamas just blindfolds the intellect. In my case, I could look at the same theorem in geometry a thousand times and it would never reveal its secrets; each time was like the first. We can go through life like this, getting the same lessons over and over but unable to get it right. Often, we don't even know we are being set a lesson. It's as if we had to read a language in an unknown script, or make sense of a message that we don't realize is in code.

On the other hand, everyone finds it a thrill to learn something difficult and master it. One year I came home with such poor marks in mathematics that I felt I was letting my family down by not giving it my best. I applied myself and passed with distinction – only to win the dubious distinction of being encouraged then to drop literature and become an engineer. That didn't tempt me for a moment, but I found it deeply satisfying to master a subject I had thought beyond my reach. Life can be like that too if we approach it in the same way: not asking “What can I get?” or “Why does this happen to me?” but “What can I learn from this? How can I learn to manage this better?”

Seeking happiness outside

Most of us start adult life under the impression that if we can make a lot of money, own a nice house, do things we like, and enjoy a reasonable measure of prestige in our chosen field, we are going to be satisfied. When we talk to people who have done these things, however, they often confide that what they wanted has slipped through their fingers. Christine and I had a friend in India who was given to building beautiful homes. She had money, good taste, and plenty of imagination, and when we met her she had just finished a new home, decorated it beautifully, and moved in expecting to be happy the rest of her life. After a year or two, she reached the realization that this wasn't going to happen after all. She moved out, went to another locality, and built another beautiful home in a different style, again under the honest impression that she could live there happily forever. This too turned out to be not quite what she was looking for; when we last saw her, she was moving on again to someplace new.

All of us do this, one way or another, and the Gita asks simply, "For how long? When will you tire of playing this game of seeking happiness outside? Don't you want to know who you are and what life is for?" In every country, there are a few people who have gone through the smorgasbord of life and are fed up. Making money, they decide, is child's play. Enjoying pleasure—where is the challenge? And as for fame, who wants a food that dead men eat? They have tried these things and found no meaning in them; now they want to know why they are here and whether life has any overriding purpose. Most important, they see that death is walking behind them, closer every day, and they have no idea what to do.

Joy only in the Infinite

Fortunately, for people who are sensitive and have some capacity to learn from their experience, it takes only a little playing with pleasure and profit to conclude that such things cannot bring fulfillment. They are life's fast learners, and they save themselves a great deal of suffering. The rest of us go on playing the same game over and over and over without learning from it. We get caught in this search for happiness outside and cannot change.

But there comes a point of no return. A friend of ours who was an airline pilot told us that in his flying days, when crossing the ocean, he had to keep his eye constantly on the gas supply because after a point there is not enough fuel to return. Similarly, there comes a point in life when retracing our steps becomes almost impossible. When we cannot change direction, when we have no choice but to continue playing with these finite things that we know cannot satisfy us, the Bhagavad Gita points out that so far as evolution is concerned, we have wasted our life.

According to the Gita, we have come into life to learn that nothing finite can satisfy us. In the Upanishads there is a quiet statement: "There is no joy in the finite; there is joy only in the Infinite." Anything that is limited, anything that comes and goes, anything that is personal or private or separate from the rest of life, will simply fail to satisfy us because our nature has no limits. All of us need a certain amount of experimentation to make this discovery, but the sooner we learn, the earlier we can avoid the frustration and sense of failure that comes as we chase one will-o'-the-wisp after another until life ebbs away.

Our need for the Infinite is inscribed on every cell of our being, and we cannot rest until that need is fulfilled.

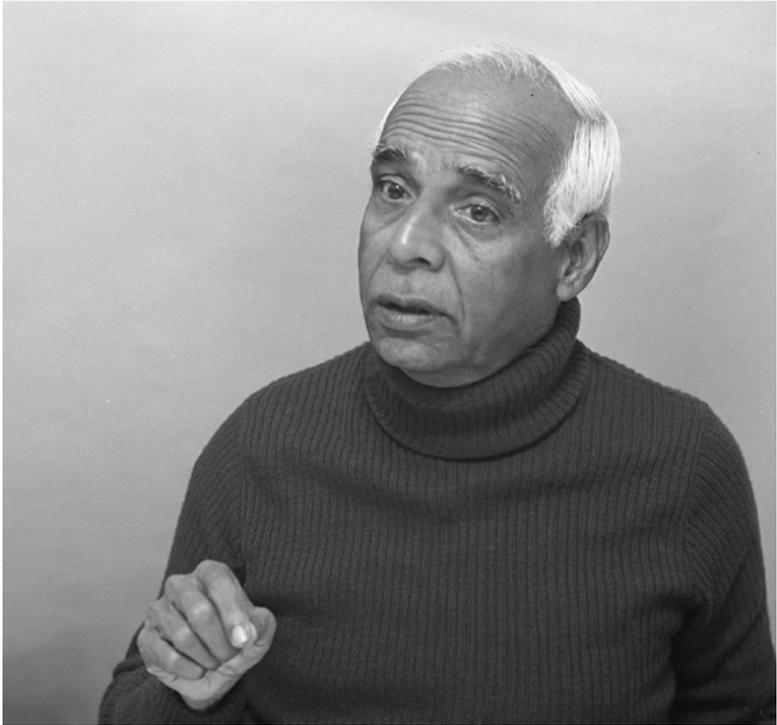
Learning the hard way

Interestingly, the name Krishna comes from the root *krish*, to draw or pull. There is a force in the depths of our consciousness that is operating all the time, trying to draw us in, but we are looking elsewhere. Life is constantly sending us reminders about where happiness is to be found, but we do not know the code. We think this force is coming from outside, so we run about seeking meaning anywhere but in our own heart.

How quickly we learn, of course, depends on us. People are different. Broadly, Sri Krishna says, there are four kinds of people who take up the spiritual life:

Some come to the spiritual life because of suffering, some in order to understand life; some come through a desire to achieve life's purpose, and some come who are men and women of wisdom. (7:16)

Those who learn early and quickly, as I said, avoid a great deal of sorrow. Others need a good deal of experimentation before they understand. But most of us have to learn the hard way, through the suffering that comes when we pursue happiness as if we were separate from the rest of life. Pain makes us step back and take a long look at our way of living. That is its evolutionary purpose, and that is why it is the most effective teacher we can have.



Easwaran, 1970s

The war within

Unfortunately, a good deal of pain may be required for those who are unwilling to learn. But when we come to understand with our heart the role pain plays in life, we see there is no event, however tragic, from which we cannot learn and grow. I have often heard people say that if it had not been for a serious illness or accident, they would never have swerved from a destructive way of life.

This understanding does not come easily to anyone, but when you can keep it in mind at all times, you find that your locus of

control moves gradually from the world outside to within yourself. You begin to feel you have control over your life. You are not a plaything of blind forces; you have a direction to which you can refer circumstances, so that you are always able to make choices whatever comes – the choices by which we learn.

In the Gita, the first of these choices is the critical one: to turn inward. After that basic decision, many other choices, increasingly difficult, will follow when we are ready to learn. But until we make this first choice, the Gita says, “the decisions of life are many-branched and endless” (2:41).

And that brings us back to the war within, for every one of these choices involves a struggle between our higher and lower selves. The Gita spells out the secret of victory in two of my favorite verses, so simple and so profound:

Reshape yourself through the power of your will; never let yourself be degraded by self-will. The will is the only friend of the Self, and the will is the only enemy of the Self.

To those who have conquered themselves, the will is a friend. But it is the enemy of those who have not found the Self within them. (6:5–6)

No one can do it for us

The word *atman* – literally, “self” – is used in more than one sense here. The Atman is the divine spark that shines in our consciousness, but in these verses, in a play on words, “self” refers also to the higher mind – will, effort, judgment, perseverance – as distinguished from the lower mind. Krishna is telling

Arjuna, “Always raise yourself by your own self” – by the efforts of your higher self; by your real Self, the Atman. Every day, raise yourself by strengthening your will and reducing your self-will. Never allow yourself to demean yourself; never do anything that will lower yourself. Raise your lower self with the help of your higher self; never drag your higher self down to the level of your lower. The divine Self is pure, selfless, unstained; the lower self is selfish and subject to whims and caprices, obsessed with getting its own way. Anything that lowers human consciousness, therefore, moves us backwards in evolution.

“Raise yourself by yourself.” It has stern implications. If we fall, Sri Krishna is implying, nobody has pushed us. We have made ourselves fall. Every time we indulge our separateness, we are lowering ourselves, making it more difficult to raise ourselves by our own will. There is only one person who can degrade us, and that is we ourselves. Nobody else. And there is only one person who can help us to rise to our full stature; no one can do it for us.

On the battlefield

Sri Krishna finds this statement so important that he repeats it. You have only one friend in the world, he says, your will; and you have only one enemy in the world, your will. Don’t ever weaken your friend or strengthen your enemy by indulging in self-will, by getting angry, by putting your welfare ahead of those around you. Ultimately, our one lasting friend is the higher self, our will. If we weaken the will, we have no friend who can stand by us, no relative, no one to bond with anywhere. We don’t have enemies outside, but we have the fiercest of enemies inside if we undermine our will.

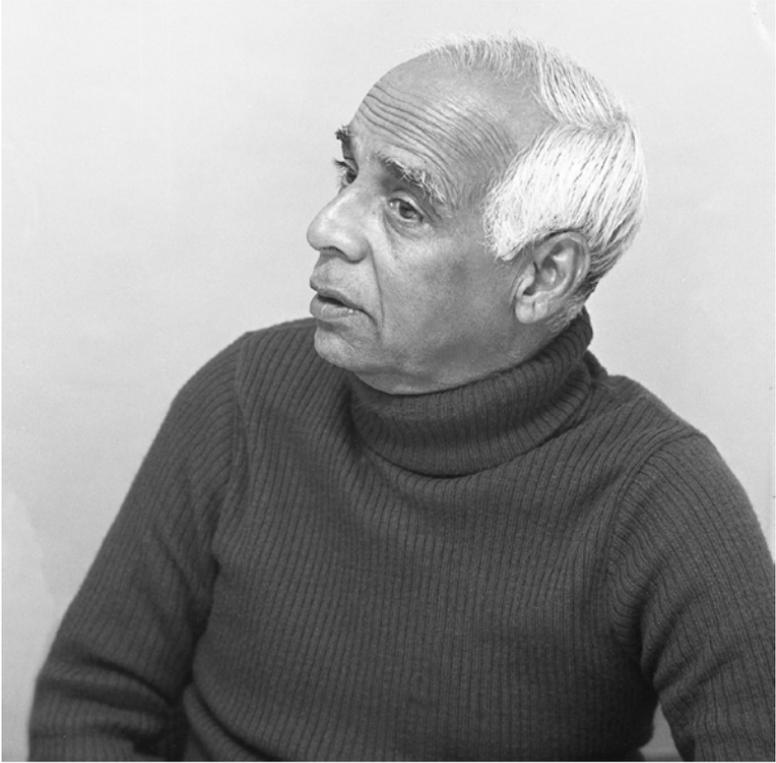
These are sobering words, for they lay responsibility for our drawbacks and defects directly on our own shoulders. This is how we have made ourselves, Krishna implies, through the choices we have made in the past. But by that which we fall, we can rise. The same power that we have allowed to work against us can be transformed, so that we can draw upon it to raise ourselves to a higher level of consciousness. The choice lies in our hands.

Thus, we find ourselves on the battlefield again, pulled by conflicting forces. In *tamas* there is no struggle, for struggle requires effort. In *sattva* too there is no struggle, because conflict has been transcended and harmony achieved. *Rajas* is the period of struggle, the “battlefield of dharma,” where *tamas* and *sattva* fight over us until *tamas* is transformed and *rajas* harnessed.

Setting the stage

But this is not the end, as those earlier verses hinted. *Sattva* is not the unitive state; it too is conditioning. Its role is to set the stage for going beyond the conditioning of the *gunas* completely:

The wise see clearly that all action is the work of the *gunas*. Knowing that which is above the *gunas*, they enter into union with me. . . . They are unmoved by the harmony of *sattva*, the activity of *rajas*, or the delusion of *tamas*. They feel no aversion when these forces are active, nor do they crave for them when these forces subside. (14:19, 22)



Easwaran, 1970s

To achieve this state, however, requires more than all the effort we can muster, more than the unification of all desires. As Sri Krishna will explain, it requires a power beyond personal agency entirely: the power that traditional religious language calls grace. 🌸

Radiant Is the World Soul

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook

Radiant is the world soul,
Full of splendor and beauty,
Full of life,
Of souls hidden,
Of treasures of the holy spirit,
Of fountains of strength,
Of greatness and beauty.
Proudly I ascend
Toward the heights of the world soul
That gives life to the universe.
How majestic the vision –
Come, enjoy,
Come, find peace,
Embrace delight,
Taste and see that God is good.
Why spend your substance on what does not nourish
And your labor on what cannot satisfy?
Listen to me, and you will enjoy what is good,
And find delight in what is truly precious.



Ramagiri Ashram

Five Insights into Personal Transformation

Eknath Easwaran, from a selection of his books

1. The first act of adult growth

Every day – the Buddha would say every instant – we are shaping our lives by how we think, speak, and act. If we lead a selfless life, we become secure and spread security to others. If we lead selfish lives, caring only about ourselves, we make ourselves insecure, rigid, self-willed, and alienated. We cannot blame God for this, nor Providence, Nature, society, or the times. The first act of adult growth is to say, “I did this to myself. Nothing brought me to this unpleasant situation except my own foolish choices. Therefore I can also get myself out, by making my own wise choices.”

2. Meditation and its allied disciplines

Meditation, of course, is our most powerful tool for rechanneling our mind, for reconditioning ourselves. Sincere and regular practice can lead to complete transformation of the contents of consciousness. But even if we sit for meditation in the morning and then again in the evening, that will not of itself change our eating habits. We have to make wise choices during the day. Meditation gives us the freedom to make these choices, but we still have to make them. If we meditate for half an hour and then get up and head for the bakery, we wipe out the benefits of our meditation. But if we can use the power released in

meditation to choose a wholesome breakfast instead, we are beginning to change ourselves. That is why I often speak of meditation and its allied disciplines: in this instance, meditation helps us train our senses, and training the senses draws on and deepens our meditation.

3. The power of the mantram

Meditation and the mantram can build a kind of miraculous wind tunnel in consciousness so that when anger blows in at a hundred miles an hour, it is turned around, to blow out as compassion – still at a hundred miles an hour, but wholly in the other direction. Greed going in at a gale comes out as a gale of love for all. There is no loss of force. I can't imagine what such a wind tunnel might look like, but I know what it feels like when these storms of passion blow up inside and are whipped around in the other direction into hurricanes of positive power. If you want to see the extent to which it can go, look at the life of Gandhi.

The power of the mantram to turn a gale of anger around is dependent on the depth at which you can repeat the mantram. On the surface of consciousness, which is as deep as anybody can get at the beginning, there is very little power in the repetition. You will note that I did not say “very little power in the mantram”; the holy name is full of power. All that is wrong is that you haven't driven the mantram in deeply enough, which can only be done through repetition – that is, hard work.

Sometimes I get letters saying, “The mantram hasn’t been working.” In my old days as an English professor I would have written in the margin, “Wrong word. *You* haven’t been working.” The mantram always works, but if you want it to do impossible things like turn around a hundred-mile-an-hour storm of anger, you have to get it down to the level of the mind where those storms arise, and that is done by repeating it over and over at every possible opportunity.

4. Competing with ourselves

Athletes, I understand, often keep a daily record of their training. In the same spirit, I take a few minutes every evening to get a bird’s-eye view of training my mind and see where I can improve the quality of my daily behavior.

This is not a negative survey. You are not finding fault with yourself. You are asking, “Where can I be a little more patient? Can I be a little more loving toward Amelia tomorrow? Can I be a little more helpful to John?” These are positive ways in which we can improve the quality of our daily living tomorrow in the light of what we have done today.

Interestingly enough, this makes every day new. Tomorrow is never the same old day. There is always something more to be done: one or two more steps to take on the path upward, some greater care to avoid the mistakes that all of us make in some small way. Instead of repining over mistakes or being resentful over them, I would suggest taking every possible care not to repeat those mistakes tomorrow and make at least a little improvement in your daily behavior.

This is why we have been given the competitive instinct: not to compete with others, but to compete with ourselves. Every evening you can look at yourself in the mirror and say, “You did a pretty good job today, I agree. But watch out! Tomorrow I’m going to outdo you.”

5. Mastering our desires

Given the sheer impossibility of it, I always find it astonishing how swiftly the transformation of personality can proceed when we are meditating with sustained enthusiasm. It may have taken you thirty years to make yourself insecure, but in much less than thirty years you can become secure, loving, resilient. The key is simple: how much do we desire to change? Patanjali, the author of the Yoga Sutras, makes a deceptively simple understatement: they go fastest who try hardest. Whether it is tennis or transformation, the secret is the same: to achieve success, we need to master our desires. 🌸

Community Stories

A Year of Personal Growth

At the time of this incident, I had been following Easwaran's teachings for about a year. I was a new meditator and was trying to incorporate the mantram into my life as much as possible.

I had bought a desk from a local store, then found I didn't need it. A friend took it back to the store for a credit, but later that day the owner called me, saying it had been a final sale. It was a complicated situation and we got into a heated argument. Finally, I said something nasty and hung up the phone. I was shaking and felt ashamed that I had let myself be provoked like that.

So, now, I had this store credit. I debated about just letting it go and losing the money. Every time I drove past the store, my heart raced, I felt my blood pressure rise, and I said mantrams.

Holding onto the mantram

Over a year passed. I was now meditating twice a day and incorporating the mantram more and more into my day. I now needed a chair and wanted to use this store credit. I was hoping that I could sneak into the store, buy the chair, and sneak out.

I held onto the mantram as I walked into the store, found a saleswoman, picked out the chair, and handed her the credit slip. She said that they didn't accept credits past one year. I replied that there was nothing on the paper that said that. She said she'd have to ask the owner. She handed the paper to the owner, who came up to me and said, "It's YOU!" and picked up the conversation where we had left off. I could have crawled under the counter.

I had no pride left and I closed my eyes, repeated my mantram, and then opened them. I had no idea what was going to come out of my mouth, but I looked her in the eye and said slowly, “That conversation has been a thorn in my side, as I am sure it has been for you and I’m very sorry that it ever happened. But you have a credit of mine and are you or are you not going to honor it?”

She was silent. She looked at the paper, looked at me, and quietly said, “Yes.”

We finished the sale and as I left, I looked at the owner, held her eye in mine and said, “Thank you.” She nodded. I felt peace at that moment. I think we both felt it. The anger, agitation, and pain of the last year was gone for both of us. I felt so much gratitude for Easwaran and the mantram and my spiritual practice. And I tried not to get excited about the change that was happening through the grace of this program.

— A member of our Affiliate Program

Transforming Anger and Anxiety

I’m a longtime student of Easwaran’s with a well-established meditation practice (dry though it may be at times). Like most folks, I have my weak spots and among my most vulnerable areas are those connected to Child 1 and Child 2.

My deep love and intense desire to protect them from all harm blew me away when they were born. This I managed to do when they were little; however as they grew, I had to relinquish my hold, let them be independent. This gradual change coincided with the advent of the tech drive to get smart phones for every child.

Although my husband and I managed to put it off until each child (by now teenagers) was the last in their friend group without a phone, we eventually succumbed to buying them “smart” devices. I put apps in place to limit screen time, but over the years, it inevitably grew and grew.

This did not sit well with me. After two decades of personally working on sense training I was limiting my own screen time to the odd family film, only skimming news feeds and avoiding social media entirely, so just the presence of the phones in my dear ones’ hands set off major alarm bells! Yet according to what I read, my teens were watching less than half the average.

Saved by my spiritual practice

This very discrepancy led to an outraged sense of missing out from my eldest and some terrible arguments between us. The more I tried to control phone use, the more they demanded more time on it and the worse I felt. When the phones came out, a grinding sense of despair prevailed and I am quite certain a scowl emerged on my face. Nice state of affairs!

This worry of mine became elevated and sometimes late at night, when I allowed my mind to dwell on it, morphed into a towering rage. Rage at the world for this terrible blight, rage at my powerlessness, rage even at my own dear child. It was bewildering! Mostly I just made myself miserable but sometimes it leaked out into my day-to-day exchanges, where I literally freaked out, causing us all mental anguish. Clearly, I was making my anxiety worse. Clearly, I was letting this negative state of mind affect myself and my family. Clearly I had to get a grip on it! But how?

Having a spiritual practice saved me. First, I was able to sit down to meditate each day and use transformational passages. I knew to ask (beg) my Teacher for help. I knew to repeat the mantram, even if I was shouting it internally at 2:00 a.m.!

Transforming energy at a deep level

And after working at it, throwing everything at this anxiety and rage night after night, literally feeling as if I might die if I didn't succeed at quelling it, I finally started to stem the tide. I think Sri Easwaran and Krishna heard my plea to look after my son for me.

Using the mantram in particular was like scraping a layer of dirt off a window—I had been blinded by my anxiety and could not get a proper sense of perspective on the situation.

The clouds in my mind slowly parted and I was able to relax and trust that my son would survive his phone use and his choices would not be too damaging to himself or anyone else. Repeating the mantram with that deep intensity may have helped me to transform the energy at a deep level. I was able to change my focus to my love for him and let my concerns fade.

Although I am still troubled by my children's media use, I am calmer in knowing I am doing all I can to set a good example and to mitigate some of the ill effects on them with my meditation practice. I am forever grateful to my Teacher for giving me the tools to work with anxiety and anger so I can take them on when they no doubt arise again.

— A member of our Affiliate Program



Ramagiri Ashram

The Saint

The Dhammapada

They have completed their voyage; they have gone beyond sorrow. The fetters of life have fallen from them, and they live in full freedom.

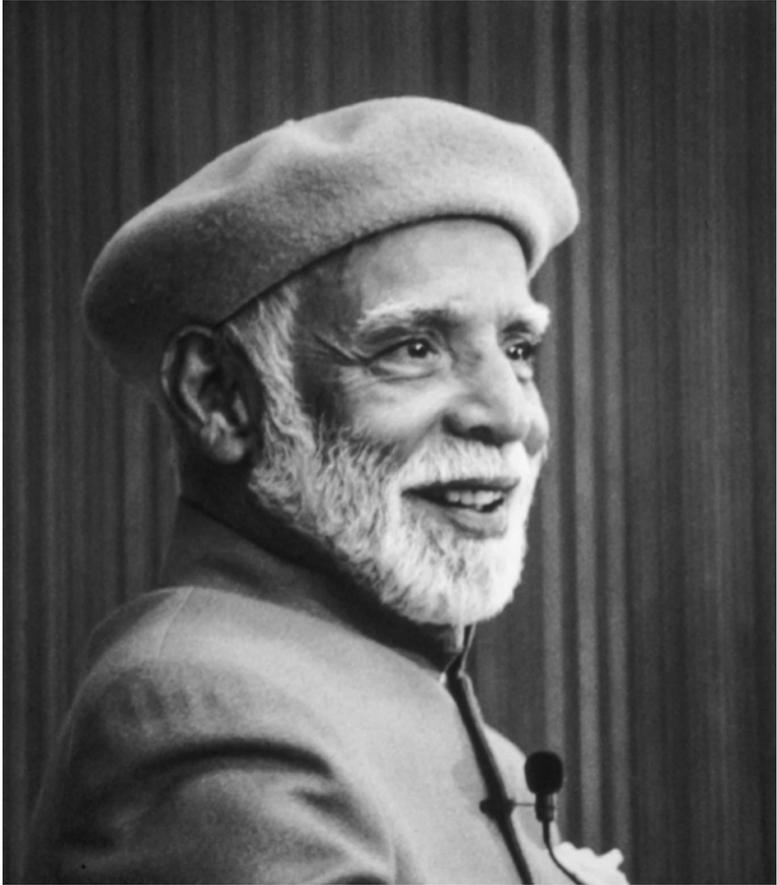
The thoughtful strive always. They have no fixed abode, but leave home like swans from their lake.

Like the flight of birds in the sky, the path of the selfless is hard to follow. They have no possessions, but live on alms in a world of freedom. Like the flight of birds in the sky, their path is hard to follow. With their senses under control, temperate in eating, they know the meaning of freedom.

Even the gods envy the saints, whose senses obey them like well-trained horses and who are free from pride. Patient like the earth, they stand like a threshold. They are pure like a lake without mud, and free from the cycle of birth and death.

Wisdom has stilled their minds, and their thoughts, words, and deeds are filled with peace. Freed from illusion and from personal ties, they have renounced the world of appearance to find reality. Thus have they reached the highest.

They make holy wherever they dwell, in village or forest, on land or at sea. With their senses at peace and minds full of joy, they make the forests holy.



Easwaran, 1990s

The Journey Home

Ekknath Easwaran, from *Climbing the Blue Mountain*

When I was a professor of English in Central India, I used to count the days at the end of the school year before summer vacation began. The temperature often climbs to over one hundred at this time of year, and along with the heat a dry, oppressive wind blows through the streets. Everyone finds it difficult to work under such conditions. In my class I would try every trick I knew to hold the attention of freshmen and sophomores on the exuberant eulogies of English literature:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.

But by May our darling buds are blighted, and everyone in India is wishing that summer's lease had never been renewed.

My luggage was ready days before the finals. On the last day I went to campus dressed for the train, and the moment all the papers were in, I stepped into a waiting carriage with bags in hand. By sunset the same evening I would be traveling south on the Grand Trunk Express, going home at last.

India is a vast country. From the Himalayas and the beautiful alpine valleys of Kashmir to the hot, dry plains of Central India is almost a thousand miles. I had nearly as far to go to reach my beloved Blue Mountains, seven to eight thousand feet above sea level, where summer means not sweltering heat but months

as mild as any that delighted Shakespeare and Shelley. Even the Grand Trunk Express takes a day and night to travel such a distance. But by the next evening I would be in Madras, far down on India's eastern coast, with just enough time for a cold bath and a good South Indian meal before catching the Blue Mountain Express.

Lofty metaphors

The trip to Coimbatore, across the southern part of India, is hot and dusty. At every stop along the way I would buy tender coconuts, whose milk soothes a parched throat better than any other drink I know. Night brings some relief; but in the crowded cars and sultry air it is difficult to sleep until the breeze begins to blow, announcing the dawn, personified as the goddess Usha, that calls all spiritual aspirants to begin their meditation.

I finish meditation as the Express steams into Coimbatore station. As I open my eyes I see the Blue Mountain beckoning, fifty miles to the north. Here the railway journey ends for me, and the real ascent of the Blue Mountain begins.

*

For thousands of years, mystics of all religions have used the image of ascending a mountain to describe the adventure of attaining the highest state of consciousness. In Hinduism the lofty Himalayas, which float above the plains of north India wrapped in silence and perpetual snow, have always symbolized the purest realms of spirit. These are the home of Shiva, "Lord of the Mountains," the eternal, perfect yogi, and of his partner, Parvati, the Divine Mother. In the West, among many others,

the great Spanish mystic John of the Cross uses the same image in his *Ascent of Mount Carmel*.

These are lofty metaphors, chosen by towering figures in world mysticism. On a much smaller scale, for those of us who are not cut to the same measure, I would like to illustrate the states of meditation with the little journey I used to make every year from the plains of Coimbatore to the summit of the Blue Mountain where my mother and I made our home.

The first stage of the journey

For years the first stage of the interior journey is dull and dreary, like the road that covers the twenty-odd miles from Coimbatore to the town of Mettupalayam. We are not traveling by train now. The rest of the journey has to be made by the kind of rural bus that I still see sometimes in this country, carrying children to school.

The road is slow and teems with travelers. The plains in this part of India have been settled for thousands of years, and from dawn till dusk the road to Mettupalayam is swollen with pedestrians, buses, cars, trucks, wagons, bicycles, and the slow, steady bullock carts that set the pace of traffic. All along the road, just as around a medieval European city, merchants have set up flimsy shacks from which they sell their wares: tea, cloth, grain, vegetables, and the black, pungent local cigarettes called *beedis*. Ancient tamarind trees flank the road; their small, densely packed leaves, green even in the hottest weather, provide precious shade from the scorching rays of the tropical sun.

From the window of our old bus the road seems like a

ceaseless river of travelers, flowing quietly to and from Coimbatore with scarcely an eddy to break its flow. Most of these men and women have only a few miles to go. When the sun sets, they will have returned to the little place they left. Our destination is much farther and much higher; yet at the end of the day, we too shall have reached home.

Faithful allies

The bus reaches Mettupalayam, at the foot of the Blue Mountain. While the driver and conductor have their breakfast, I walk about in the crowded bazaar. Vendors sitting on the pavement call their wares: “Chili-hot *vadai*! Sweet *halva*! *Beedis* to smoke! Hot tea to drink!” I turn a deaf ear and return quickly to the bus. Who wouldn’t find it pleasant to linger in the bazaar for the rest of the morning, sampling all the wares? But the bus is leaving, and as Robert Frost says,

I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

During the early stages of the ascent, every spiritual aspirant has to keep saying no when the senses clamor for things that will only add to the burden of the journey later on. “Don’t eat this. Don’t drink that. Don’t smoke this. Don’t sniff that.” This is all you hear from your spiritual teacher. There is no rapture; there is no ecstasy; only “keep plugging along.”

This kind of discriminating restraint of the senses is not asceticism. Its purpose is not to punish or subjugate the body. We need to train the senses to be faithful allies in our ascent,



Easwaran, 1990s

for two compelling reasons. First, the body is our vehicle; we need to keep it healthy, strong, and resilient so that it can carry us steadily and safely to the summit of consciousness. Second, training the senses strengthens the will day by day, enabling us gradually to gain control over the fierce passions that rage beneath the surface of consciousness in every one of us.

Without an unbreakable will it is not possible to move up from the Valley of the Shadow of Death; the will itself will turn against us and hold us down. “The will is your only enemy,” the Gita tells us, “and the will is your only friend.” The will can become our most powerful ally; but left untrained, the will becomes self-will, our worst enemy on earth.

Dark realms

I breathe a sigh of relief as the bus leaves behind the din and dust of the town and crosses the Bhavani River, named after the Divine Mother. Soon we are in the foothills. I glance back through the window. Without being aware of it we have climbed imperceptibly from the plains to the “elevated camp” which *Mettupalayam* signifies in Tamil.

That is how sadhana proceeds these first few years. From day to day you seem to make no progress. But when you glance back to the year before, though you have a vast distance yet to travel, you realize that you have risen significantly above the physical level of awareness. Your nervous system is more resilient, your will stronger, your senses more responsive, your mind and relationships more secure; your goal is that much clearer before your eyes.

We are above the foothills now. For miles the road winds through a dense forest, abounding with wild animals: elephants, tigers, leopards, bison, bears, and cobras. These creatures cannot be seen from the outskirts of the forest, which entice us with slender, graceful bamboos and colorful wildflowers. But anyone attracted into the depths of the forest will soon hear the roar of a powerful tiger, pouncing on a deer as it leaps for life.

These are the dark realms of the unconscious. When we break through the surface layers of awareness in meditation, we come face to face with these untamed passions: anger, fear, lust, self-will. They have always been there prowling, but while we stay on the outskirts of consciousness we scarcely glimpse their number or their power. We do not hear the tiger roaring or the

moan of the deer beneath its paw. But that does not allow us to escape the ravaging effects of these destructive passions, which can destroy our health, rend relationships asunder, and bleed us of vitality, wisdom, and love.

Overcoming selfish passions

These deep, destructive forces or *samskaras* are the causes of all personal problems. Fortunately we cannot come face to face with them until we develop the detachment, dexterity, and determination to overcome them. This is one of meditation's greatest safeguards. By contrast, potent psychoactive drugs can throw you into the tiger's lair before you have the strength and skill to ride a tiger and tame it.

But these fierce creatures *can* be tamed. If you have been meditating sincerely and systematically with sustained enthusiasm, repeating the mantram as often as possible, I can assure you that the mantram will come to your rescue in every one of these jungle encounters. When you can repeat it deep in the unconscious, the mantram releases immense inner resources. You will have to struggle for many years, but in the end every selfish passion can be overcome: not repressed, not destroyed, but brought over to your service and trained. Then the power of fear is transformed into fearlessness, anger into compassion, hatred and resentment into love.

*

Now we are three thousand feet above sea level. Spread out below is the fertile district of Coimbatore, with the Bhavani River, like the Divine Mother herself, nourishing the fields,

trees, animals, villages, and cities of the land. *The Hymn to the Divine Mother as Bhavani*, composed more than a thousand years ago by the great Kerala mystic Shankara, wells up in my heart:

In times of war or strife or sorrow,
Of danger whether at home or abroad,
From flood and fire, in forest or mountains,
Or amidst my enemies, Mother, protect me!
You are my source, my path, my goal;
You alone are my refuge, Bhavani.

A vast web

The mountain slopes grow steeper. We pass a school team practicing rock climbing; a single rope binds them in safety to one another and to their teacher. By this stage in sadhana, we know first-hand that the meditation passage is our lifeline at these heights of consciousness. One end is fastened securely to our teacher, who has traveled this way before. He knows just where to tell us to put our feet and drive in pitons, where to belay, what false steps to avoid. Even a sincere aspirant may glance down and panic, or miss a foothold, and slip or even fall. But as long as we hold fast to our teacher, practicing all the disciplines of sadhana precisely as instructed, we will always be safe.

It is marvelous to watch this team of dedicated, aspiring young climbers on these precipitous slopes, each tied to the one ahead and all tied together to their teacher. Life is like that, a vast web of delicate relationships binding us together in love. As Francis Thompson says,



Easwaran, 1990s

All things by immortal power
Near or far,
Hiddenly
To each other linked are,
That thou canst not stir a flower
Without troubling of a star. . .

If we destroy those ties of unity, we fall. If we care for and preserve them, even if it means ignoring our own personal pleasures and profit, we thrive. As Sri Krishna says in the Gita, this is seeing the Lord in everyone, everywhere, every minute.

Our very life a work of art

By now the hot air of the tropical plains lies far behind us. In its place is a bracing, refreshing coolness. The din and dust of the cities is a faint memory, and the terrain has changed slowly from wild jungle to orderly estates where man and nature cooperate. On the lower slopes we pass vast coffee plantations, with occasional jack trees laden with huge fruits. On the higher slopes, coffee gives way to terraced tea gardens dotted with silver firs, whose leaves sparkle in the sunshine. From occasional thatched huts by the roadside I hear the laughter of children and the merry chatter of women. A girl saunters by with a basket on her head, selling mangoes, guavas, and red bananas.

Though there is still a long way to climb, we have gained real mastery of body and mind. During this stage we may be granted a brief glimpse of the summit we are trying to reach. We may free ourselves of severe inhibitions and crippling dependencies. We may find relief from long-standing physical maladies of the heart, lungs, digestive organs, or nervous system, caused by the storm and stress in the mind. Vast reserves of love may be released into our lives, and the capacity to express that love with innate artistry in all relationships. Most of all, our very life becomes a work of art. These are the fruits of sadhana, and we must receive them as they come—without elation, without excitement, without basking in them in any way.

An unseen power

Around a bend in the road we find an unexpected delight: a misty waterfall, formed where countless rivulets merge as they

descend. The driver stops for a few minutes so we can have a refreshing drink of this crystal water, flowing among the shrubs and grasses of the slopes like the Ganges high in the Himalayas, which the scriptures say flows down the long, matted locks of Lord Shiva to purify the hearts of his devotees. Teresa of Avila too speaks in this way of divine grace. First, she says, we must draw it all by ourselves from a deep inner well. But the time will come, as she and every sincere aspirant will testify, when grace flows like a steady stream within, giving us strength, determination, and love far beyond our finite means.

Until now we have been making all the effort in our climb. But from now on we feel an unseen power drawing us from above, guarding us against the dangers of the precipitous ascent. This grace does not come from any external power. We have shown our dedication, purified our effort; now the Lord of Love, the Divine Mother within, begins to draw us to her, infusing our limited will with hers, which is infinite.

*

We are ascending slopes above five thousand feet. The air intoxicates me with its purity; the greens of the foliage and the blue of the sky make me laugh at what I used to call green and blue in the dusty, smoky air of the plains. Even sound has become clearer and purer: the call of a cowherd calling his cows, the song of a wandering sadhu chanting the names of the Lord, the laughter of children at play. Just to breathe at these heights is exhilarating. But we need enormous resources to live in this rarefied air – resources we have been developing gradually during our long, arduous ascent from the arid plains to the cool silence of these mountain heights.

My native state

We are over six thousand feet now. I hardly feel my body. My mind is still; my ego has been set at rest. The peace in my heart matches the peace at the heart of nature here. This is no strange place. I recognize landmarks, faces, sounds, the shimmer of sunlight on the silver firs far below, the smell of eucalyptus in the pure air. Even the birds and animals are familiar; I seem to know them all.

This is my native state, the state to which I have been striving through the long travail of evolution to return. No longer am I a feverish fragment of life; I am indivisible from the whole. I live completely in the present, released from the prison of the past with its haunting memories and vain regrets, released from the prison of the future with its tantalizing hopes and tormenting fears. All the enormous capacities formerly trapped in past and future flow to me here and now, concentrated in the hollow of my palm. No longer driven by the desire for personal pleasure or profit, I am free to use all these capacities to alleviate the suffering of those around me. In living for others I come to life. “I die,” exclaims Saint Paul, “and yet I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.”

As I walk up the lane of eucalyptus trees to my home, my heart sings my mantram like a bird at dawn:

Hare Rama Hare Rama
Rama Rama Hare Hare
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna
Krishna Krishna Hare Hare

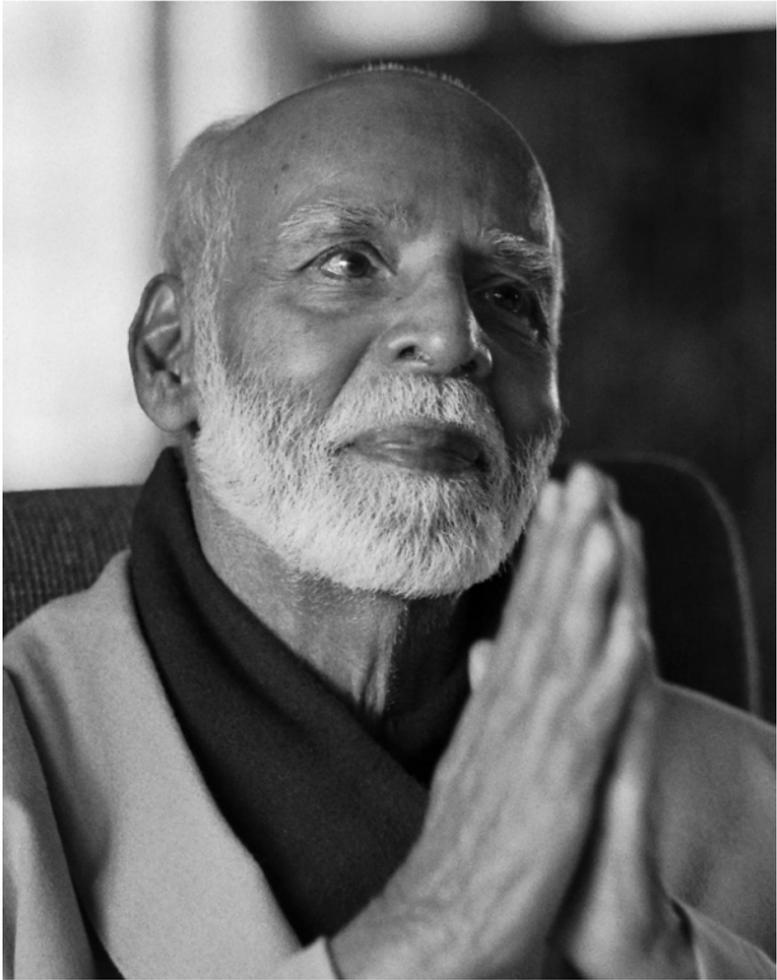
Everyone's home

Long ago on the plains, with my life filled with the world's daily affairs, I found little time to remember this road, this gate, this cottage where my mother has been waiting. Already it is difficult to remember that there is anything else.

I open the little gate. Mother stands with open arms to receive me. How long has it been? How long have I taken to see through the playthings of the world and come home? This is my home. This is everyone's home, where the Divine Mother waits with open arms for all her children to be reunited with her.

I look back beyond the road, where the terraced slopes of the Blue Mountain drop away to the plains so far below. The foothills where I struggled along the noisy, teeming roads are but vague silhouettes; the oppressive plains, where thousands pass the summer without relief, seem no more than a dream. How easy it would be to forget!

But I recall the passengers on the train, the faces of men and women with their work and wares on the road to Coimbatore, the children playing in the noisy bazaar less than a day's journey away. Most of them, I know, seldom think to raise their eyes to the heights we stand on. Few ever dream that this is no inaccessible retreat, but their own home. After absorbing the profound peace of this exalted place, I must go back again to help others turn their eyes upward. Perhaps, when I return here again, I will be able to bring a few home with me. 🌸



Easwaran, 1990s

The Very Purpose of Life

Ekknath Easwaran, from *The Mantle of the Mystic*

The mystics tell us that two forces pervade human life: the upward surge of evolution and the downward pull of our evolutionary past. Ultimately, everything in human experience, every side of human nature, has a supreme evolutionary purpose: of leading, pushing, cajoling, forcing us upwards toward the goal of life. ... The mystic aims at nothing less than the capacity to enter this state at will, and to become so established in it that the world of unity is as clear as the everyday world of duality. The whole purpose of meditation is to slow down and eventually still the frantic, distorting process we call the mind; for when the mind is still we see life as it is: one indivisible whole. This supreme vision brings out the capacity to love unflinching and to live wisely always.

In meditation, when concentration is so deep that no distractions enter your mind, you will not be aware of your body; you will not feel the chair you are seated on, or hear any sound outside. The senses close down; they do not register at all. The joy that wells up in that state is boundless. When this tremendous height is reached there can be no awareness of separateness. Then, the mystics say, you cannot help but be in love with all. Saint Bernard calls this “love without an object”: you don’t just love this individual and that; you become love itself.

According to Hindu and Buddhist mystics, this is the state that all of us are going to reach someday. This is the goal of the long travail of evolution, the very purpose of life. 🌸

Easwaran's Eight-Point Program of Passage Meditation

- 1. Meditation on a Passage** Silent repetition in the mind of memorized inspirational passages from the world's great religions. Practiced for half an hour each morning.
- 2. Repetition of a Mantram** Silent repetition in the mind of a holy name or a hallowed phrase from one of the world's great religions. Practiced whenever possible throughout the day or night.
- 3. Slowing Down** Setting priorities and reducing the stress and friction caused by hurry.
- 4. One-Pointed Attention** Giving full concentration to the matter at hand.
- 5. Training the Senses** Overcoming conditioned habits and learning to enjoy what is beneficial.
- 6. Putting Others First** Gaining freedom from selfishness and separateness; finding joy in helping others.
- 7. Spiritual Fellowship** Spending time regularly with others who are practicing passage meditation for mutual inspiration and support.
- 8. Spiritual Reading** Drawing inspiration from writings by and about the world's great spiritual figures and from the scriptures of all religions.

About Eknath Easwaran

Eknath Easwaran (1910–1999) is the originator of passage meditation and the author of more than 30 books on spiritual living.

Easwaran was a professor of English literature at a leading Indian university when he came to the United States in 1959 on the Fulbright exchange program. A gifted teacher, he moved from education for degrees to education for living, and gave talks on meditation and spiritual living for 40 years.

In 1961 he founded the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, a nonprofit organization that publishes his books, videos, and audio talks, and offers online retreats and programs.

Easwaran lived what he taught, giving him lasting appeal as a spiritual teacher and author of deep insight and warmth.



Further Resources for Learning to Meditate and Deepening Your Practice

From the BMCM Programs team

Introductory Webinars

A chance to try out passage meditation.

www.bmcm.org/programs/introductory-webinar/

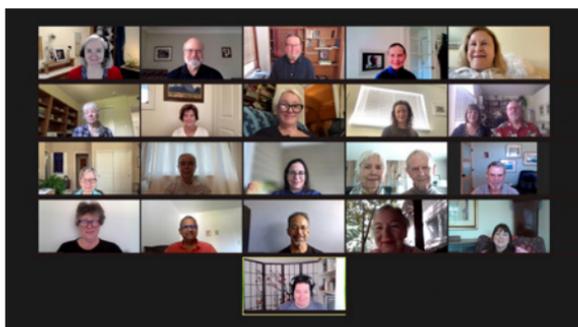
Introductory Weekend Retreats

Everything you need to get your passage meditation practice started.

www.bmcm.org/programs/introductory-weekend-online/

Passage Meditation – A Complete Spiritual Practice

Easwaran's classic manual, available in print and as an ebook and audiobook.



BMCM Satsang Live

Our twice-weekly online satsang takes place on Tuesdays from 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Pacific Time and is repeated on Sundays from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Pacific Time.

Find more at www.bmcm.org/community/bmcm-satsang-live/.

Online Retreats, Webinars, & Workshops

Our online retreats and programs have become the training ground for those of us who yearn to join Easwaran in making the spiritual renaissance a reality. In the retreats, you will experience turning to your practice, to Easwaran and his teachings, and to a strong spiritual schedule. The retreats combine contemplative activities with practicum times in which you apply your practice directly to your own unique home environment.

Introductory Webinars:

January 27, May 11, August 17

Returnee Workshops:

March 9, June 1, October 5

Weeklong Retreats:

February 23–27, June 21–25, October 18–22

Introductory Weekend Retreats:

March 15–17, July 26–28, September 27–29

Returnee Weekend Retreats:

April 12–14, August 9–11, November 8–10

Affiliate Program:

March 23–August 3

Setu (Senior) Retreats:

January 19–23, May 3–7, September 13–17

For more information about upcoming events, including fees and financial aid, visit our website at www.bmcm.org/programs. We'd love to have you join us!



Given the sheer impossibility of it, I always find it astonishing how swiftly the transformation of personality can proceed when we are meditating with sustained enthusiasm. It may have taken you thirty years to make yourself insecure, but in much less than thirty years you can become secure, loving, resilient.

— Eknath Easwaran

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