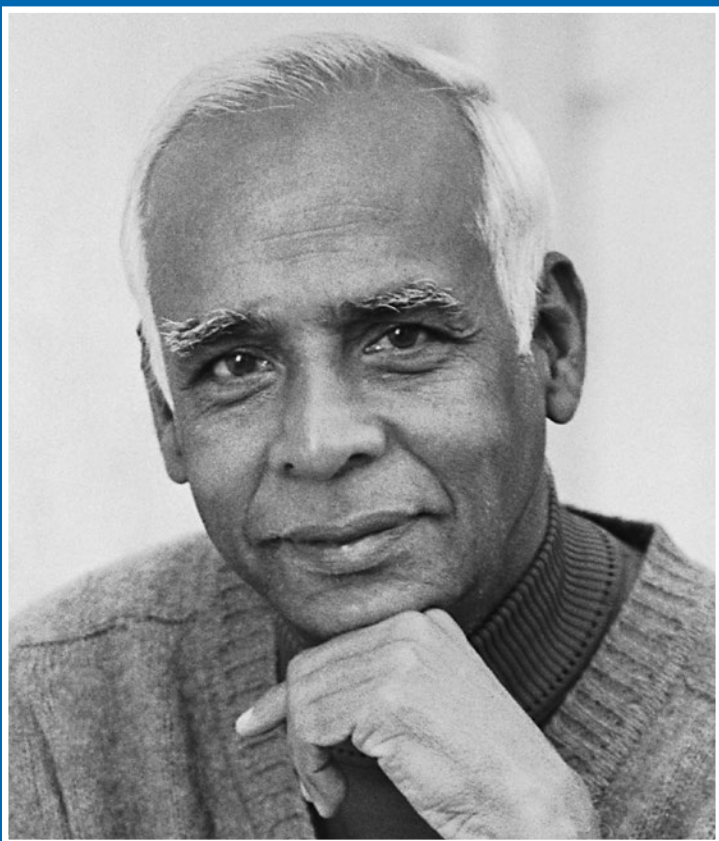


Eknath Easwaran on Meditation & Spiritual Living

# Blue Mountain Journal

Fall 2024



## Strength and Courage

in Turbulent Times

## In This Issue

“It has been said,” Easwaran writes, “that anyone who wants a peaceful life has chosen the wrong time to be born. The last hundred years have seen incessant turbulence, change, and danger. Around the world, people are living with a deep anxiety about the future. In such situations it is only natural to ask now and then, ‘Why was I born into times like these?’”

Easwaran responds, “We have been born to be of help to others. Desperate times are a sign of a more desperate need. To make our full contribution, we need to train the mind to be at peace and then radiate that peace to those around us.”

The articles in this journal, including one by Christine Easwaran, give us inspiration and practical spiritual tools so we can be such a force for peace. This issue also highlights the use of the mantram and offers stories from our community on applying these tools in everyday life.

May Easwaran’s guidance bolster our strength and courage so we can all make our full contribution in these turbulent times.

– The BMCM Editorial Team

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to carry on his work.

# The Highest Kind of Courage

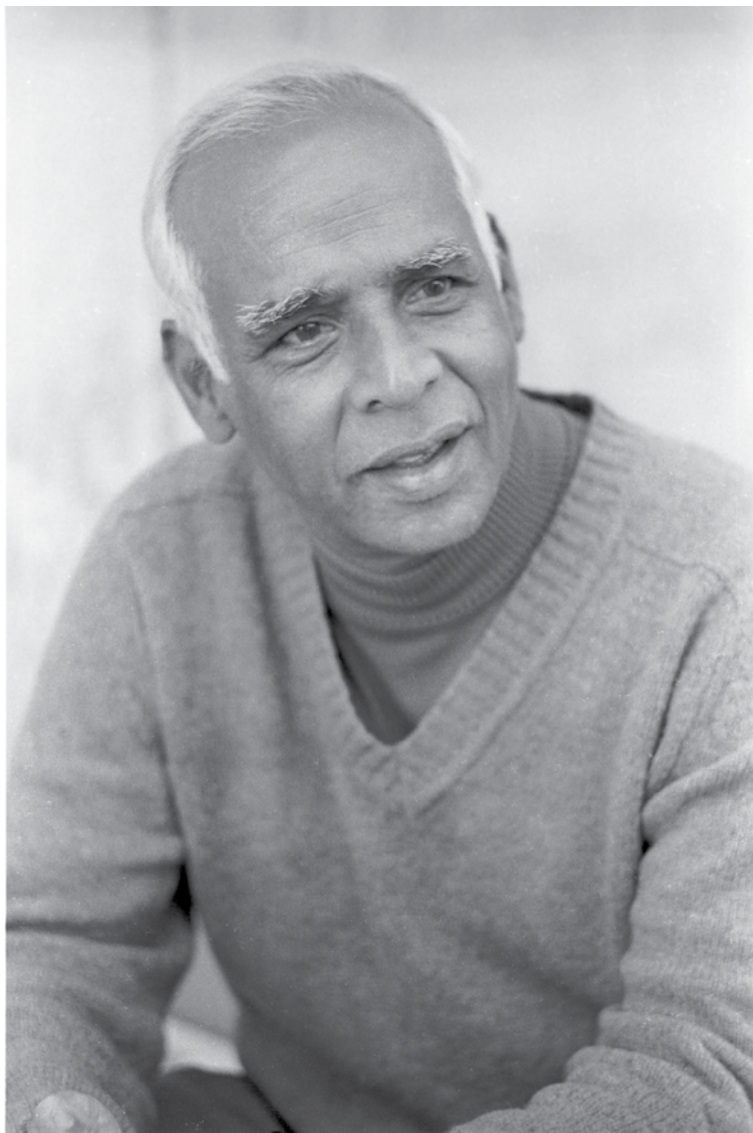
Eknath Easwaran, from *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*

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Success on the spiritual path requires the highest kind of courage we can muster, for every ounce of our strength and resolution will be tested. It was my spiritual teacher, my mother's mother, who showed me through the example of her own life that it is the nonviolent person who cannot be frightened; the violent person can always be threatened with greater violence. If you want to see real bravery, look at the person who is patient under attack, who will not retaliate, who will suffer rather than inflict suffering on others.

This is the heroic ideal Jesus the Christ gives us to follow: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." Sri Krishna, in his infinite grace, helps Arjuna find this source of strength within himself, just as he enables us, when we turn to him, to become patient when attacked, forbearing when provoked, and loving when hated. This is the way we grow fearless and strong enough to grapple with the grave problems that threaten our world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eknath Easwaran', with a large, sweeping initial 'E'.



Easwaran, 1960s

# The Candle of the Lord

Eknath Easwaran, from our Journal archive

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In India the times we live in are called *Kali Yuga*, the “Age of Darkness” – or, as I translate it, the Age of Anger. With the world torn asunder by war and violence invading our cities and even our homes and schools, uncontrolled anger has become the hallmark of daily life. It saturates our media, our entertainment, our personal relationships, even our speech.

Since 1961, when I began this work, I have witnessed a steady decline in the quality of life throughout the modern world as anger and violence become taken for granted as part of life. This is a trend that threatens everyone, for anger in one corner of the globe now can find expression thousands of miles away. With the technology of destruction within easy reach, one person full of hatred can wreak havoc and terror anywhere.

All of us harbor a good deal of anger, if not on the surface, then deep in consciousness. That is our human condition. But an angry person can never help lead an angry world from darkness into light – a responsibility that each of us needs to assume now if we want a safer world.

## A changeless reality

In my first weeks in this country I was taken to the Truman Museum in Independence, Missouri. There I saw an ancient clay lamp that had been presented to President Truman by the Jewish community of Boston. At its base was an inscription that is often translated, “The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord.”

How this candle is to be lit has been described by lovers of God in every major religion. The principles they agree on are very simple. The entire phenomenal world has as its basis a changeless reality which is present in the depths of consciousness in every one of us. It follows that each of us – not only saints – can discover this changeless reality through spiritual disciplines, the foremost of which is meditation or interior prayer.

I have to confess I have very little interest in theology, metaphysics, or philosophy. I consider myself a very ordinary, down-to-earth man who likes what Americans call “do it yourself.” My approach to the scriptures is entirely on this basis: that they are practical manuals to the art of living, and the truths in them can be verified by anyone prepared to undergo the necessary disciplines.

These disciplines need to be able to take us far beyond the senses, the intellect, and the mind, which are but finite instruments. Even logic tells us that a finite instrument cannot be used for fathoming the infinite. We need a higher mode of knowing. As a psalm in the Book of Common Prayer says beautifully, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

The Bhagavad Gita describes how this higher mode of knowing can be developed. “Still your mind completely,” the Lord tells us, “and you will be united with me here and now.” His disciple Arjuna, who represents you and me, objects, “It’s easier to control the wind than the mind!” And the Lord replies, “There is a simple secret: regular, systematic, steadfast daily practice.”

## A mind that does not flicker

The clay lamps used in ancient Jerusalem are still common in village India. People pour in a little coconut oil, insert a wick, light it, and keep the lamp on the window sill on festive days. When the lamp is placed outside, the flame flickers wildly and may even go out whenever a breeze blows. But when the lamp is inside the home, in an alcove or shrine, the tongue of flame is absolutely still; it does not flicker at all.

In deep meditation, the Gita says, when you are concentrating on the Prayer of Saint Francis, your mind should be like the flame of a lamp in a windless place – it should not even flicker. It should be completely on the words of the prayer – which means, in practical terms, that you are slowly becoming like Saint Francis in your daily character and conduct.

When the mind does not flicker, there can be no fear. When the mind does not flicker, there can be no anger. All negative emotions are wild movements in the mind that vanish when the mind is still. This is a state that all of us can reach through the grace of the Lord by using the great Prayer of Saint Francis: “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.”

Meditation develops the most precious capacity a human being can have: the capacity to turn anger into compassion, fear into fearlessness, and hatred into love. This is the greatest miracle of meditation – not seeing visions, not hearing voices, but the capacity to purify the heart of all that is selfish, violent, and degrading. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

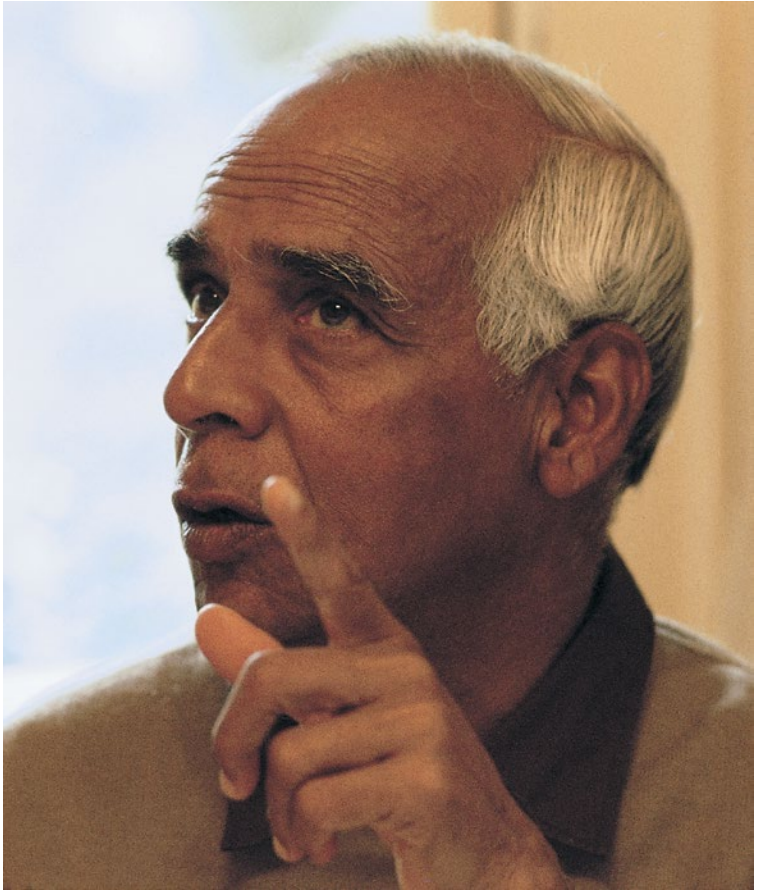
## Light the lamp of wisdom within

“For though wilt light my candle,” says a Psalm of David: “The Lord, my God, will enlighten my darkness.” To anyone in whom this candle is lit, spiritual leadership comes – entirely through the grace of God.

In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord promises that he will rescue the world whenever righteousness declines and violence threatens to overpower us. Traditionally this is understood as divine incarnation. But it applies equally to the miracle of transformation, when some personal crisis turns an apparently ordinary person like Mohandas Gandhi or Francis Bernadone into a beacon figure who lights a path back from the brink of self-destruction.

In Indian mythology, this recurring saga is dramatized vividly. When the suffering of the world becomes unbearable, it is said, Mother Earth herself goes to the Lord and throws herself at his feet in an appeal for help. The Lord responds by coming to life in a human being whose consciousness is ready for service as an instrument of peace.

In my interpretation, the Lord’s promise to come to our rescue can be understood in a third way too. Little people like you and me may not be a Gandhi, a St. Francis, or a St. Teresa, but if we do everything we can to still our mind and subdue our self-will, the Lord can light the lamp of wisdom within so that we, too, can contribute a little light instead of adding to the darkness of our times.



Easwaran, 1960s

## Our common humanity

In any human being, a profound personal crisis can open a channel into the depths of the unconscious.

I would hazard the guess that this is what happens in cases of serious addiction, when life becomes so unbearable that an ordinary man or woman suddenly finds the strength to reverse the deep-seated self-destructive habits of a lifetime.

We see the same miraculous transformation on a grander scale in the lives of many great saints. In spiritual terms, this is the Lord within responding to a wholehearted appeal from the very depths of the heart.

Spiritual psychology would explain the myth of the Lord coming to the rescue of Mother Earth in a very similar way. When the world is sick to the heart with violence, that revulsion opens a channel deep into the collective unconscious, the race-old consciousness of our common humanity. Little people all over begin to find the will to make deep changes in their lives to fulfill that longing for peace. Then, when a beacon figure comes to show a way out – Jesus or the Buddha, Moses or Muhammad, Gandhi or St. Francis or St. Teresa – the ground is ready. Our hearts are open for them to teach.

## At the eleventh hour, rescue comes

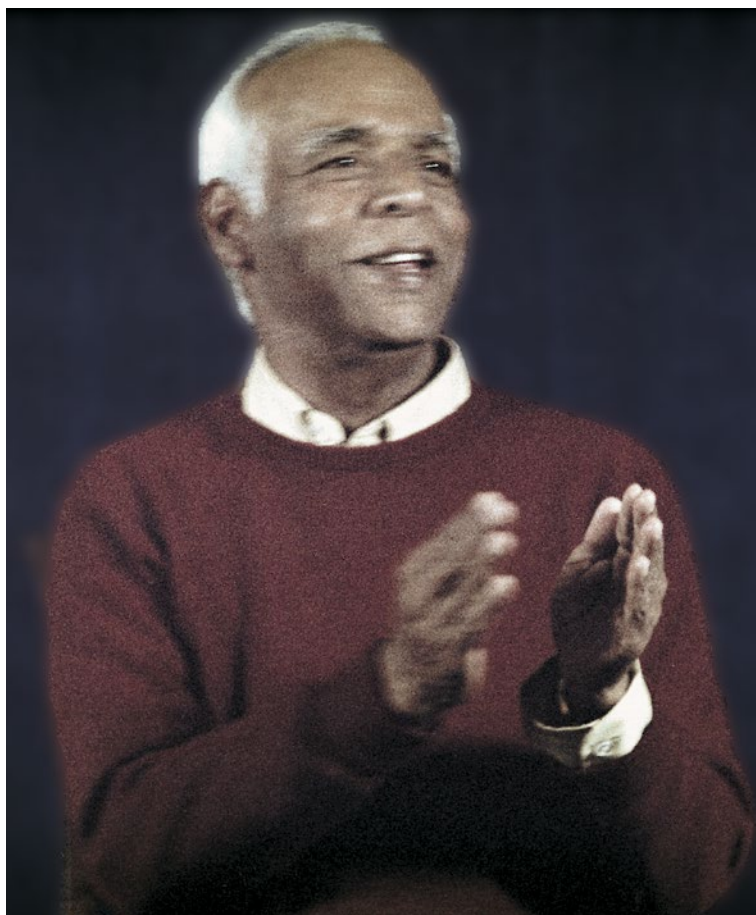
The prayer of Mother Earth in this myth is the collective cry of countless ordinary people like you and me around the world. Prayer from the heart really means prayer from the depths of the unconscious – not oral prayer, but prayer without words. When prayer arises from the depths of the unconscious like this, tremendous forces – life forces that operate beneath our

fragmented, superficial, egocentric awareness – are touched and moved and brought into action. These eternal laws, which are as operative as the law of gravity, open their doors to those who have no personal irons in the fire, who do not seek any profit or prestige but depend entirely upon the Lord.

Gandhi tells us from his own bitterly-tested personal experience that there is no prayer from the heart that will not be answered. But the Lord will answer it, he says, not on our terms – that is the heartbreak – but on his. We cannot see more than a small corner of the vast stage of the human drama, on which consequences already set in motion have to be played out. But always, at the eleventh hour, rescue comes.

“My faith is brightest,” Gandhi says, “in the midst of impenetrable darkness.” I can assure you that Gandhi knew intimately what it was like to stand in darkness and alone. This is how faith is tested. When everything looks dark, when there is no silver lining on the horizon and the earth is pitch black from pole to pole, faith will burn brightly. That is the kind of faith that Gandhi had, that my grandmother had. With that kind of faith, prayer of the heart can bring into operation those eternal laws which ensure that good prevails and evil disappears.

May the Lord of Love grant us all that faith which can never be put out by any storm that blows. 🌸



Easwaran, 1970s

# Solving the Problem of Fear

Eknath Easwaran, from *Strength in the Storm*

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For most people, I imagine, radio has lost its magic. But I remember vividly the awe I felt as a boy in my remote Indian village when I first heard, as if by magic, a box with knobs and dials pull out of the air a thin voice from thousands of miles away: “Good evening. This is the BBC . . .”

Today, of course, the air around us is awash with messages at different frequencies. Music, news, chatter, advertisements – we can tune to whatever we like.

It is very much the same with the mind. All of us know how sensitive we can be to feelings around us. We sense tension when we walk into a room, register the hostility in a meeting, vibrate with the emotions of a football crowd. And in times of crisis, when the very air seems full of fear and anger, everybody’s internal radio picks up the mood – and, all too often, passes it on.

This is a useful illustration, because it reminds us that the mind can be tuned. We do not have to accept the fear or anger around us; we can tune to a more positive channel. And when we do this, we are not the only ones who benefit. Just as everyone in a café relaxes when loud music is turned off, not tuning in to anger creates a zone of calm that helps those nearby calm down too.

## The signal has been sent

This is easiest to see by negative example. You must have noticed how easily one person’s irritation is picked up by others.

We bring it home and pass it around until everybody in the family falls asleep in it. Whenever we are discourteous, unkind, inconsiderate, selfish, we are broadcasting emotional states for others to pick up, even if we do not express our feelings in words or action. It's not the passing event it seems. The signal has been sent, and like sound or light, it goes on spreading.

Similarly, when we are kind to somebody, a little force of kindness is released in the field of consciousness around us. If we go on being kind, the force becomes stronger. And when we do this every day, even to people who are unkind to us, the force becomes potent and reaches far. Even as you read this, such forces are at work within and around you. Kindness is working against unkindness, and the stronger it is, the farther it will reach.

This is crucial, for as Emerson says, "The ancestor of every action is a thought." How we think shapes how we act, and the net effect of how each of us thinks and feels shapes the behavior of the groups we live in. The family is affected; co-workers are affected; eventually there is an effect on society itself.

## Collective fear and helplessness can put a dictator into power

And just as personal interactions shape the dynamics of a home or office or community, the sum total of all these interactions shapes the events of history. Markets are moved by the fear and greed of millions. Collective fear and helplessness can put a dictator into power. Anger multiplied a million times erupts in violence and triggers wars: leaders arise who are attuned to those emotions and express them in destructive action.

The mental states we tune to actually gain strength from the attention we give them. The more attention we give, the stronger they become. And just as people become addicted to drugs, the mind can become addicted to certain kinds of thinking. Fear is a drug; it can alter consciousness. So can greed. Anger is one of the most powerful of drugs, far more addictive than cocaine.

Nothing is more important for the modern world to understand. Any decision or action taken under the influence of fear, anger, or greed has to be disastrous. That is why most international policies are not successful: they are taken under the influence of fear, greed, and anger.

### Strengthen what is positive

Fortunately, negative states of mind fade if they are not reinforced by repetition. However strong they appear, they come and go. What is positive in consciousness is permanent, unchanging. That is why I say that original goodness is part of our very nature. When we cease to feed negativity with our attention, what remains is positive. We can strengthen what is positive by removing negativity from our minds. That is what spiritual practices like the mantram can do.

The mind, then, is not only a receiver. It is also a repeater, passing on what it receives. Most of us have only a few watts to broadcast with, while someone like Gandhi could send his message around the world. But each of us is on the air. We broadcast what we are, and others pick it up. When Gandhi said “My life is my message,” he was speaking for us all.

Most of us do not like the idea of being a passive repeater for other people’s messages. We want to have a positive influence.

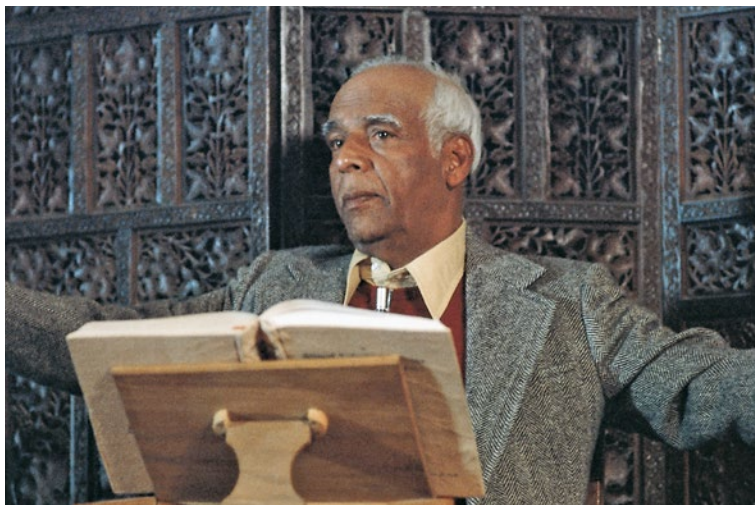
Why do our lives seem to have so little effect? The answer is that most of us have minds that are scattered or distracted: sometimes positive, sometimes negative, constantly changing with our shifting moods and desires. If we don't seem to have much effect on the world we live in, it's because the signals we broadcast are weak and confused. It is the concentrated, focused mind that reaches people. All the great changes in the world for good and for ill have come from the impact of men and women with an overriding singleness of purpose and a concentrated mind. In our own times, on the positive side, Gandhi is a perfect example.

## Born to be of help to others

Fortunately, none of us are stuck with the mind we're born with. With practice, a distracted mind can be made one-pointed. By skills like repeating the mantram and learning to focus on one thing at a time, the mind can be made one-pointed on the essential goodness in every human heart. Then every negative emotion can gradually be transformed into a force for good. Anger, the most destructive of emotions – destructive of health, of peace of mind, of relationships, of life itself – can, when transformed, become a loving force that can change the world.

It has been said that anyone who wants a peaceful life has chosen the wrong time to be born. The last hundred years have seen incessant turbulence, change, and danger. Around the world, people are living with a deep anxiety about the future.

In such situations it is only natural to ask now and then, “Why was I born into times like these?” The answer I would give is that we have been born to be of help to others. Desperate



Easwaran, 1970s

times are a sign of a more desperate need. To make our full contribution, we need to train the mind to be at peace and then radiate that peace to those around us.

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## Drawn into selfless service

By the time I went to college, Mahatma Gandhi had taken center stage in India, and he made his life an open book. Everyone in India knew that as a child he had been subject to all kinds of fears. Even as a young man, he confessed, he was afraid to go out at night without his wife.

And he was terrified of public speaking! Early in his law career he had to plead an open-and-shut case where all he had to say was, “Your honor, the accused owes my client fifty rupees and he won’t pay.” He stood up, opened his mouth, and

couldn't get out a word. Finally he had to hand the case over to a colleague and rush out of court humiliated.

That is the man who went to South Africa as a timid, untrained clerk and got drawn into selfless service. By the time he returned to India, twenty years later, all that fear had vanished. Against overwhelming odds and brutal opposition, he had led a completely nonviolent campaign against racial legislation in South Africa and won. In India, he could stand against the greatest empire the world had seen and say, "Do your worst. I will not retaliate, but I will never retreat."

Today we would ask, "What kind of therapy did he undergo? What workshops did he attend?" But Gandhi never set out to make himself fearless. He simply began trying to serve those around him, spending less and less time on indulging himself and more on helping others. And the primary skill he used to support himself in these efforts was repetition of the mantram. Effort and the mantram together changed fear into fearlessness, anger into compassion, hatred into love.

## A beacon for our times

That transformation is the reason I consider Gandhi a beacon for our times. "I have learnt through bitter experience," he said, "the one supreme lesson to conserve my anger, and as heat conserved is transmuted into energy, even so our anger controlled can be transmuted into a power which can move the world." And he added, "I have not the slightest doubt that any man or woman can achieve what I have, if he or she would make the same effort and cultivate the same hope and faith." That is what the mantram can do.

To see how the mantram deals with fear, it helps to look again at the mechanics of the mind. Fear is a frantic flickering of attention: the mind is being whipped like a flame in the wind. Whatever the provocation, what handicaps us at such times is not so much an external threat as this inability to concentrate, this incapacity to hold our attention steady. And the practical application is that as attention becomes steady again, fear *has* to subside.

Flickering attention is a sure sign of a divided mind. Division is tension. Division is friction. Division is ineffectiveness. Division is futility. And a mind divided cannot stand. Most of us have a mind that is divided; that is why it sometimes cannot stand under the impact of life.

## How to solve the problem of fear

The mind can be compared to a huge highway with traffic racing along twenty-four hours a day. The problem is that thoughts don't know how to drive. They stop here and there, weave in and out of traffic, and race out of control, an utter danger to everyone around.

This is what most of us call thinking. And the practical problem is that if a thought creeps up alongside us in the next lane, we get distracted. It steals our attention. We see the license plate, FEAR, and we start trembling. We keep glancing over, get jittery, and abruptly find ourselves darting over into its lane. The next thing we know, Fear has a tow hook on our bumper and is dragging us wherever it likes.

This gives a practical clue to how to solve the problem of fear. If you learn to keep your attention steady, a negative emotion



Easwaran, 1970s

like fear can wave, honk, do anything it likes to distract you into its lane and get its tow hook on you; you won't react. Eventually it will have to go away, because you scarcely know it is there. Like a concentrated driver that cruises along smoothly in one lane, you cannot be distracted from your purpose.

Having a calm, steady mind is like driving a long distance in a powerful car on cruise control. You select the carpool lane and drive smoothly to your destination without any difficulty, danger, or delay – no compulsive darting into other people's lanes, no U-turns in the face of traffic, no being totaled and towed away.

### Hold on to the mantram

And the mantram can help us get where we want to go. The mantram has the power to transform negative forces in the

mind into positive ones. There is nothing magical about this; the mantram simply takes advantage of the fact that when the mind is in the grip of negative emotions like fear and anger, thoughts are always racing. In positive states like love and compassion, consciousness is calm. So whenever the mind starts to race in fear or anger, repeating the mantram simply touches the brake.

Whenever a negative emotion starts to rise – a wisp of anxiety or fear, a rush of anger – if you can immediately start repeating your mantram in your mind, that gives the mind something to hold on to. If you can continue to hold on to the mantram at such times, the energy in that emotion is transformed, very much the way the energy of a rushing river is transformed into electricity. That is the secret of the mantram's power.

## No fear can enter and oppress you

Today, after years of practice, I can assure you on the basis of my own experience that when you are repeating the mantram with full attention, no fear can enter and oppress you. The mantram will be cruising the highways of consciousness like a traffic officer on a Harley Davidson. That is the surest way of preventing the mind from wandering into strange byways where nothing but what is unpleasant waits for us.

The mantram is particularly precious for children dealing with fear, because it is so simple it can be practiced at any age. The other day at the hospital, for example, I saw a small child being given an injection. The wailing wrung my heart. That's why I take every opportunity to tell mothers to teach their children to repeat the mantram at the earliest possible age. When

they go to the dentist, when they feel threatened, when they hurt themselves or have nightmares, the mantram is of immense help.

## One fatal superstition

In the depths of consciousness, even the bravest among us lives in a world of fear – the result of deep evolutionary conditioning that tells us we are separate and alone in a hostile world. We are protected from this awareness by a merciful amnesia that allows us to function outside the jungle, but deep in consciousness these fears are always present, manifesting themselves whenever we let our minds get agitated by events around us.

We could make a catalog of these fears, but they all stem from one fatal superstition: the belief that we are merely physical creatures, separate from the rest of life. A fragment cannot help feeling constantly alienated and alone, desperate for protection, always anxious that what it has will be taken away. Whatever face such people present to others and themselves, those who are acutely aware of their own separateness – their family, their community, their country, their race – are, beneath appearances, fragile and insecure. Their primary responses to life are to fight or to run away.

## Freedom to meet life's challenges

With the mantram, this sense of being separate and threatened by those around you gradually falls away. You will feel at home wherever you are, whoever you are with. You have a third alternative, beyond the conditioned reactions of fight and flight: the freedom to meet life's challenges with the response you choose. 🌸

## Weaving Your Name

*Kabir*

I weave your name on the loom of my mind,  
To make my garment when you come to me.  
My loom has ten thousand threads  
To make my garment when you come to me.  
The sun and moon watch while I weave your name;  
The sun and moon hear while I count your name.  
These are the wages I get by day and night  
To deposit in the lotus bank of my heart.

I weave your name on the loom of my mind  
To clean and soften ten thousand threads  
And to comb the twists and knots of my thoughts.  
No more shall I weave a garment of pain.  
For you have come to me, drawn by my weaving –  
My ceaselessly weaving your name  
On the loom of my mind.

# The Power of the Mantram

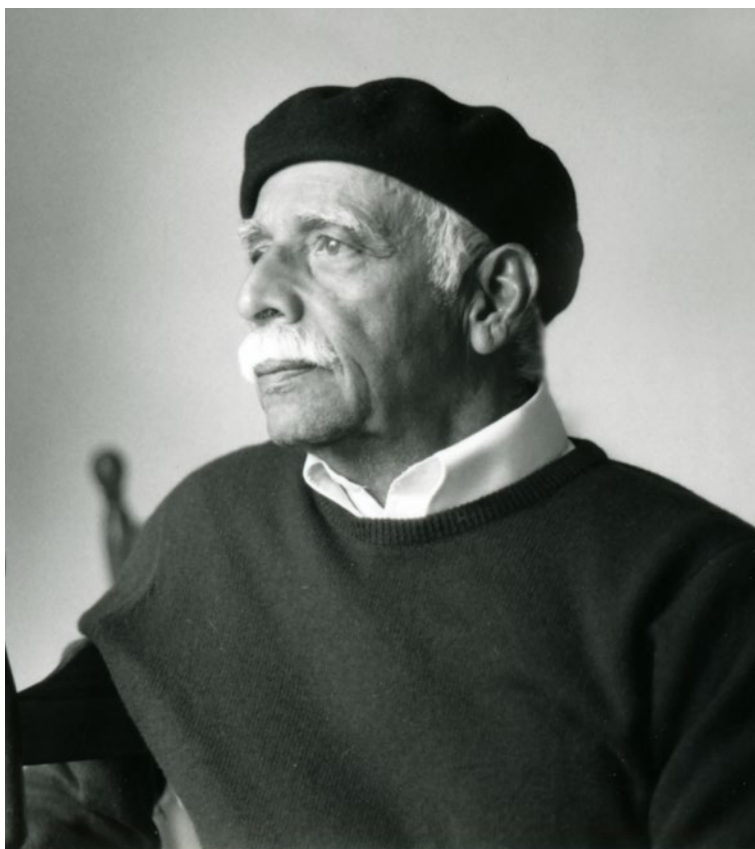
Eknath Easwaran, from our Journal archive

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It is meditation every morning that gives you the wonderful capacity to stay patient and forgiving no matter what the day brings. When you know from your own experience what the tremendous benefits can be, you look forward to meditation. When the alarm goes off in the morning, even in the dead of winter when the bed is warm and the blankets hold you down, you get up for your meditation with eagerness and enthusiasm every day, well or not so well, because you know that meditation is the key to the art of living.

But meditation alone is not enough. You can make great progress during a morning's meditation only to see it all undone at the breakfast table, when someone admits to having dented a fender slightly or overdrawn the checking account. To hold on to the precious advances you make in meditation and to extend the effects of meditation into the rest of the day, you need to practice certain supporting disciplines as well.

The first of these is the use of the holy name, called the mantram in Sanskrit. Meditation is going inside to pay a formal visit to the Lord who lives in the depths of consciousness: you sit down and politely give him your undivided attention. Repeating the mantram, by contrast, is quite informal, though never casual. There are times throughout the day and night when you need to draw on the Lord for love or wisdom or strength, and you need to do it right now, regardless of where you are or what you are doing. You're not paying a visit in



Easwaran, 1980s

person; you can't even afford the price of a phone call. Instead, you're calling the Lord collect. A wave of fear or anger is about to overtake you, or a great wave of selfish desire, and you just go out for a brisk walk repeating your mantram in your mind. The rhythm of your breathing will blend with the rhythm of your footsteps. Soon you will find that the rhythm of your mind has slowed down too, and its turbulence has subsided.

The power of this simple discipline has been laid out eloquently by the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*:

. . . a naked intent directed unto God, without any other cause than himself, sufficeth wholly. And if thou desirest to have this intent lapped and folden in one word, so that thou mayest have better hold thereupon, take thee but a little word of one syllable, for so it is better than two; for the shorter the word, the better it accordeth with the work of the spirit. . . .

And fasten this word to thy heart that so it may never go thence for anything that befalleth. This word shall be thy shield and thy spear, whether thou ridest on peace or on war. With this word thou shalt beat on this cloud and this darkness above thee. With this word thou shalt smite down all manner of thought under the cloud of forgetting; insomuch that if any thought press upon thee to ask what thou wouldst have, answer with no more than this one word.

When people say or do harmful things to you, you can almost see the cloud of darkness forming across your mind. It is this cloud that covers over your need to give and forgive, and it can seem as thick as a great thunderhead. But with the mantram you can just beat on that cloud until you disperse it and drive it away, and there behind it, shining like the sun, is the capacity to forgive others and draw them closer to you. It isn't always that you forget the wrongs that have been done or said, but there is no longer any emotional charge.

In the Hindu tradition, one of the names of the Lord is “the ocean of forgiveness.” If we want to be united with him, we need to forgive all those around us, for in learning to forgive we move closer and closer to the Lord, who is the source of forgiveness itself.

When you begin to travel inward through meditation, you will see for yourself how many things the mind has not been able to pardon. For a while, all you can do is look at them in dismay. But if over many years you have developed compassion for others, then that same wealth of compassion will come to you when you most need it. It will equip you with a kind of spiritual eraser. Now you will be able to walk up to a memory that has spread hostility, fear, or greed in your mind for decades and just rub it out.

If anyone were to ask me about the mistakes I made in the past, I would say simply, “That was how I saw life then. Now, through the grace of the Lord, my vision has been corrected.” That is why I repeat over and over again, “Don’t let your mind dwell on the past.” Everybody has scars from the past. Don’t talk about them; don’t think about them. I am the first to admit that this is a tall order. It can be done, though, through repetition of the holy name. 🌸

## How to Choose and Use a Mantram

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

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A mantram is a powerful spiritual formula which, when repeated silently in the mind, has the capacity to transform consciousness. There is nothing magical about this. It is simply a matter of practice, as all of us can verify for ourselves.

Every religious tradition has a mantram, often more than one. For Christians the name of Jesus itself is a powerful mantram; Catholics also use *Hail Mary* or *Ave Maria*. Jews may use *Barukh attah Adonai*, “Blessed art thou, O Lord,” or the Hasidic formula *Ribono shel olam*, “Lord of the universe.” Muslims repeat the name of Allah or *Allahu akbar*, “God is great.” Probably the oldest Buddhist mantram is *Om mani padme hum*, referring to the “jewel in the lotus of the heart.”

In Hinduism, among many choices, I recommend *Rama, Rama, Rama*, which was Mahatma Gandhi’s mantram, or the longer mantram I received from my own spiritual teacher, my grandmother:

*Hare Rama Hare Rama*  
*Rama Rama Hare Hare*  
*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna*  
*Krishna Krishna Hare Hare*

Select a mantram that appeals to you deeply. In many traditions, it is customary to take the mantram used by your spiritual teacher. Then, once you have chosen, do not change your mantram. Otherwise, as Sri Ramakrishna puts it, you will be like a person digging shallow holes in many places; you will never go deep enough to find water.

Repeat your mantram silently whenever you get the chance: while walking, while waiting, while doing mechanical chores like washing dishes, and especially when you are falling asleep. You will find that this is not mindless repetition; the mantram will help to keep you relaxed and alert.

Whenever you are angry or afraid, nervous or worried or resentful, repeat the mantram until the agitation subsides. The mantram works to steady the mind, and all these emotions are power running against you which the mantram can harness and put to work. 🌸

# Community Stories

## Finding Peace in Times of Turmoil

For a long time now, the headlines and news reports have seemed devastating to my sense of peace. The more wicked and gruesome the crime, the more details appear to be described. It is not uncommon for a video or YouTube to go viral, enabling everyone to watch over and over a tragic violent incident. The good news is that after more than five years of passage meditation and following Easwaran's eight-point program, I have been able to markedly reduce my consumption of violent news.

This started by choosing to not watch and rewatch prolonged hours of TV coverage of mass shootings and other "live" incidents of violence. I used my mantram to literally step away. This allowed my agitation to lessen and allowed me to say or write my mantram to help those in the situation. I limited my TV viewing to periodic updates only.

My reading of full headline sensational news articles has also become a thing of the past. I stay informed with two online sources which supply the daily headlines with a brief synopsis only. Even these sources, I often cut short, after one or two sentences, by saying my mantram and moving on.

To help further curb the pervasive violence of our times, I also have chosen to increase my spiritual reading in the evening, replacing violent TV shows and violent movies with the high ideal of mankind as shown by the mystics. It is Gandhi and other mystics who have shown that the key to change the world is to start with oneself. Easwaran recently wrote in the Thought for the Day, "our first priority is to reform ourselves; without that,

how can we expect to help other people reform themselves?”

When a particularly disturbing current event angers me and goads me to fight, I use my mantram and recall Easwaran’s message, and determine I will focus on myself and change myself first. To do this, I have been purposefully focusing on passages to promote peace.

The passage below has been a favorite of mine ever since it appeared in a *Blue Mountain Journal* years ago. I use it every morning to begin my meditation. This invocation to an Upanishad speaks deeply to me, including so many of the ideas and goals Easwaran has presented to us. I have been especially drawn to it because this free rendering by our teacher resounds with his love and blessings.

We are what we meditate on.

– A meditator from the Midwest

## A Prayer for Meditation

*Eknath Easwaran*

May I open my eyes in the morning with the holy name on my lips. May I see God everywhere and in everyone. May I never hurt anyone and may I never be afraid of anyone.

May I be inspired to choose persuasive words, loving language, creative and positive thoughts, to carry peace and good will throughout the world.

May my meditation deepen, so I can draw upon the source of all life.

May I fall asleep at night with the holy name on my lips, to heal my wounds and prepare me for another day of service.

## A Cancer Diagnosis: Diving Deep

I have always been so grateful to Easwaran and the eight-point program. My sadhana is a work in progress, and over the years I've noticed my resentments fading and my temper improving. I was finding a lot more joy and security in life.

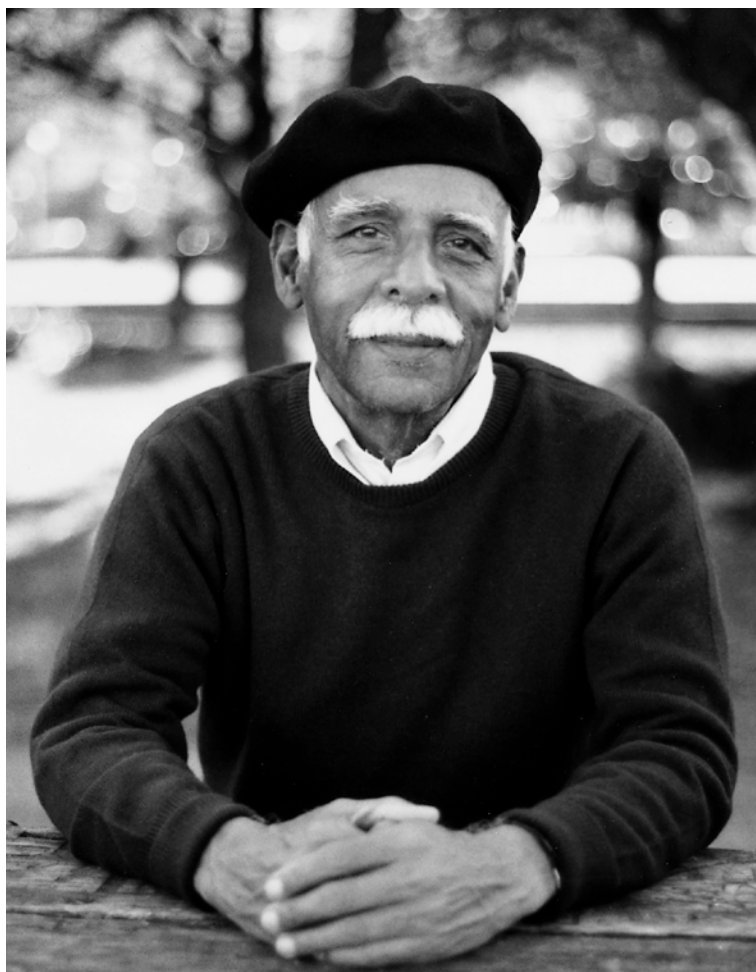
Then, about five years ago, my practice faced its first real test: I was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was a long period of learning the diagnosis and treatment options, and although everyone told me this was the worst part, the waiting was interminable. I was pretty distraught. I had teens still at home, elderly parents to care for, and work that contributes to our household income, as well as more existential thoughts about life and mortality. I called the BMCM in a panic. They suggested some very concrete ideas from Easwaran's teachings: writing and listening to the mantram, leaning into my satsang, reading and listening to Easwaran, and reading and learning passages about overcoming fear.

I really began to rely on our practice to help me get through this difficult period. I wrote mantrams, walked with the mantram, learned new passages, deepened my concentration in meditation, prioritized twice-daily meditation, and listened to Easwaran sing his mantram in the middle of the night to avoid brooding. I felt closer to Easwaran and connected with the passages on a deeper level. Interestingly enough, I became calmer in the light of the anxious waiting and treatment. I also naturally shed harmful and unhelpful cravings, helped family and friends process my diagnosis, and underwent surgery with healthy detachment. By deepening my practice to help with my fear and uncertainty, I also gained a variety of unforeseen benefits. What a bonus!

Four years later, I faced a recurrence. The updated diagnosis came with surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, and an abundance of new challenges. I was feeling ill, losing hair, facing mortality, wondering about my karma . . . And still, diving down deep in sadhana is the answer, providing detachment, security, and courage.

Easwaran often mentions that we do not know the depth of our meditation from any feelings or visions we get during meditation. The depth of our practice is exercised during the rest of the day, asking if we can remain calm in the face of challenges, return kindness for unkindness, or forgive perceived wrongs. My reaction to my breast cancer recurrence has been much more measured than five years ago. I haven't had the same feelings of panic and instead have tried to embrace the opportunity to dig deeper in sadhana. It is a reminder that my time here is limited, and I can't waste it on trivial matters.

– A member of our Affiliate Program



Easwaran, 1980s

# Finding the Courage

Eknath Easwaran, from *Essence of the Dhammapada*

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Along the mighty crescent of mountains that runs from Pakistan to Nepal there are snowclad peaks that beckon to mountaineers and pilgrims from every country on the face of the earth – men and women who want to test their endurance, to push their capacity to the utmost. On these high peaks, above twenty thousand feet, a physical curtain falls, and most ordinary human beings can live only for a few hours. Yet there are always a few – dauntless, determined, daring – who are prepared to make this most difficult, dangerous ascent.

I like to think of the Buddha, who was born in the far north of India in the shadow of these holy mountains, as a daring mountain guide, a spiritual sherpa who draws people who are not content to follow the petty, private urges of life. The vast multitude, those who live out their entire lives on the dusty plains, have been conditioned to content themselves with trifling satisfactions which they can hardly question. But in every country there are a few men and women who are prepared for the tremendous adventure that the Buddha places before us. They are tired of living in the valley of the shadow of death, and they find the pursuit of pleasure not wicked but boring. The pursuit of money is not just greedy, it's dull. These spiritual climbers have the same spirit as the British mountaineer George Mallory who, when he was asked why he climbed Mount Everest, gave the perfect answer: "Because it is there."

## First of all, endurance

The Buddha really likes such tough, daring people, and his teaching is meant for heroes like these. This is neither morality nor philosophy; it is simply that if we follow the Buddha's way there will be challenges from beginning to end. At no time will we be able to sit back and say, "I am done."

So to the first quality required on the spiritual path, earnestness, the Buddha now adds a second: courage. By cultivating these two qualities all of us can go a long, long way – but first we must understand what the Buddha means by courage. Here courage means, first of all, endurance, which is just the opposite of what is often depicted as courage in movies and on television. For the Buddha, to be angry or revengeful is not courageous; it shows utter bankruptcy of courage. Today it's almost taken for granted that if you are not angry you are not strong; you are not tough. We have been brainwashed not to see bravery as it really is. It's a topsy-turvy world we live in, one in which we associate mere physical bravado with toughness and courage.

A few days ago I watched a film in which a gang fight was portrayed. These scenes are common in films: young men boasting of their courage and trying to provoke their rivals so they can overpower them with violence. But in this movie there was one young man who refused to fight in spite of every provocation. He was nonviolent, and he could not be frightened. I was so impressed I couldn't resist following my granny's example – she was known for expressing herself quite freely during performances – and saying out loud, "He is very brave!"

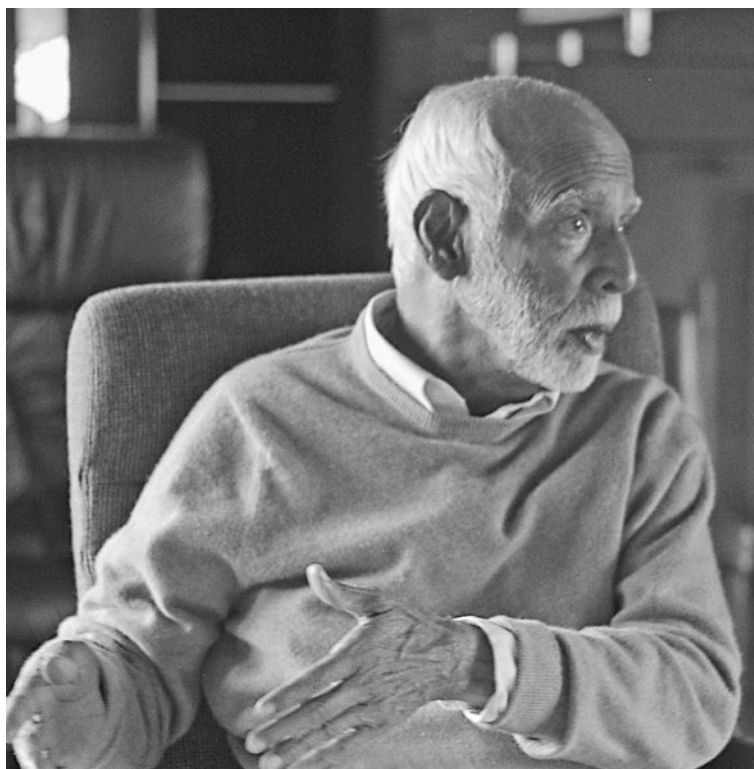
I hope I didn't disturb the people in back. If you want to see bravery, look at the man or woman who can endure, who can be patient under attack, who will not retaliate, who will suffer rather than inflict suffering on another. That requires enormous courage.

## **We should not live in fear**

When I was a little fellow, I was afraid of certain boys in my village who were notorious bullies. My fear of fighting them was not entirely because I was nonviolent; it was partly plain old cowardice. Seeing my difficulty, my granny came to my rescue by giving me a deep insight into violence. "Remember," she said, "violent people are cowards. Don't be afraid of them." It's good to understand that angry people are frightened people. We should take precautions and understand the danger, but at the same time, as my grandmother said, we should not live in fear. People without anger, who have great love, have inner courage.

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There is no lack of stamina in people today. There is no lack of daring in surfing, hang gliding, and rock climbing. But a thoughtful person would have to ask, To what purpose? What is the point of skydiving just to show how youthful we are? Daring and dedication are meant to be used for a higher purpose. The world today is not lacking in people with toughness and daring, yet often these qualities are used for personal profit, pleasure, and achievement. The same capacity to hang tough, to refuse to yield in the face of obstacles, can be harnessed in meditation – as it has to be if nirvana is to be achieved.



Easwaran, 1990s

## Inward toughness

This is the toughness the Buddha shows when he sits under the bodhi tree and resolves, “Let my blood dry up! Let my body fall away! I will not get up from this place until illumination dawns.” That is the spirit that is required, even by little people like us. It means no other goal will distract us, no obstacle will deflect us, because we want to reach the other shore so much we are not going to count the cost. When obstacles appear, people with this inward toughness find that all their fighting instincts come to their aid.

To think that nirvana is going to come to us by special delivery – that all we have to do is answer the door, take the package and open it, and there it is, nirvana – is to show an absurd misunderstanding of the Buddha’s words.

When I go to San Francisco I like to visit Cliff House, with its beautiful view of the Pacific. Today I was watching the sea lions – portly, ponderous, pompous. There were about twenty of them in the waters swirling around the rocks below. For a long time they tried to climb up to bask in the sun, but each time one would go near the rocks, it would be pushed back by the crashing waves.

Those sea lions didn’t say, “Let’s give up and let the waves wash us out to sea.” They came back again and again. Every time they were pushed away, they would disappear under the water and then come back to try again. I watched what persistence they have, what a fixed goal they clung to. At last one fellow made it. He lumbered up onto the top of a rock, lifted his head, and bellowed. I could almost hear him telling

me, “You can put me in your book, and show people how they can succeed in meditation.”

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## Not afraid of a challenge

When I began teaching meditation in this country, in California in the nineteen-sixties, I found that the young people in my Berkeley classes, like most young people, looked for challenge, even risk. For them, to hear was to act. When an adventurous young man would hear that someone has jumped across the Grand Canyon on a motorcycle, he would immediately get on his motorbike and go riding about looking for the nearest canyon. If he falls, he gets another bike and tries another canyon.

In my village it was the same. We didn't have motorcycles, but there too teenagers were not afraid of a challenge. If somebody told us not to jump into the river from certain high rocks, we would immediately climb up and jump. So the Buddha says be like the teenager, who doesn't count the cost.

The Buddha is looking for people who have found that jumping over canyons and hang gliding are not daring enough, not challenging enough. Students of the Buddha want a challenge worthy of a human being, and they finally come to the conclusion there is no challenge on earth that can come up to crossing the river of life.

Turbulence, enthusiasm, enterprise, stamina – with these qualities in abundance, young men and women respond deeply to the Buddha's message. This is why we are given a fighting spirit: not to fight against others but to fight against our own

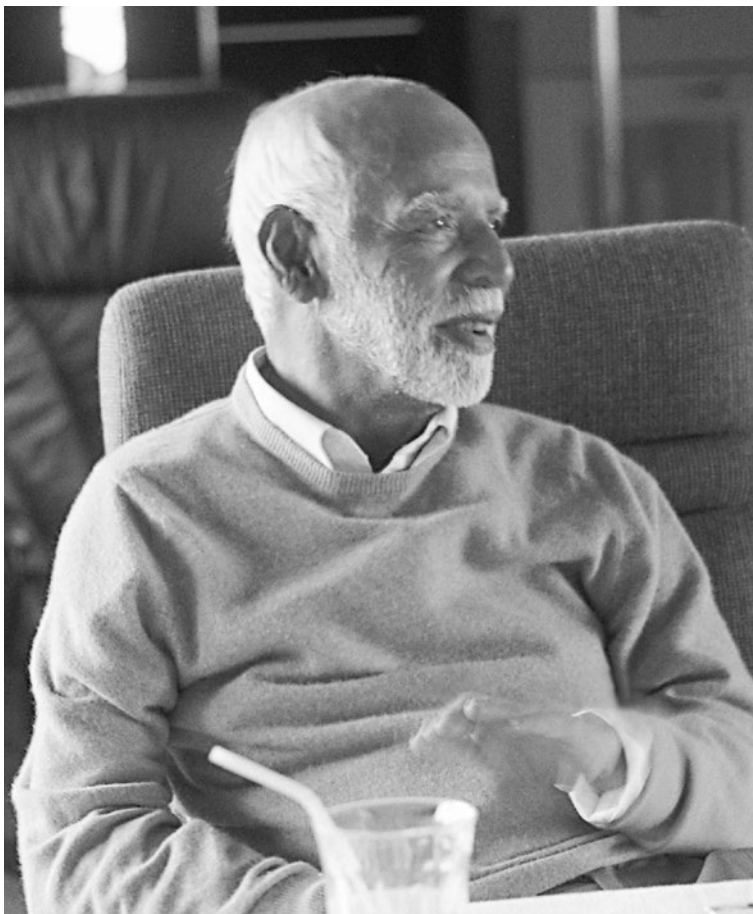
negative qualities, to “conquer all our passions, go beyond the world of fragments, and know the deathless ground of life.”

## The real fight begins

Every ounce of resistance, rebellion, aggressiveness, and militancy we have will be used in this. Show me people who are really aggressive, really impetuous, and I will tell them that if they take to meditation they can go far. Even those who have negative qualities in generous measure can utilize those traits on the Buddha’s path. If we have positive qualities, well and good. If we have negative qualities, also well and good. What more could we ask for?

When the Buddha says someone is brave, he means that if that person is caught in a difficult situation he will not get diffident, she will not get dejected. For those with this kind of courage, the situation won’t be utterly dark. They will find some way to use that situation for the benefit of others, even at the cost of some suffering for themselves. They will prefer to bear suffering themselves rather than inflict it on others.

There is only one way that is practical for all of us: to resolve that from today onwards, whatever it costs us, we will not let those around us suffer. The essential phrase is “whatever it costs.” It is easy to agree up to a certain point: “Yes, up to a certain point I am prepared to suffer rather than bring suffering to others.” But the Buddha would reply that “up to a certain point” is easy; what he is asking of us is all after the point. That’s the whole fight. Up to a certain point there is no fight; it’s just shadowboxing. The real fight begins after that point, when every animal instinct in us is crying out to strike back.



Easwaran, 1990s

## When we fight against others we always lose

Life has a way of putting enemies in our path. Even the Buddha had enemies, but he chose to conquer himself rather than conquer others. In his own family, from his earliest days, there was another boy – a cousin named Devadatta – who was jealous of Siddhartha because of his goodness. Devadatta continued to be a thorn in Siddhartha's side all his life. Devadatta fought others and lost. The Buddha fought himself and won nirvana.

When they were boys, Devadatta couldn't sleep because of the perfection of his cousin. As they entered manhood, another reason was added for Devadatta's hatred: he too wanted to marry Yashodhara, who chose Siddhartha instead. For him his rival was not the "Compassionate Buddha" but the man who got his girl. Though Devadatta eventually entered the order and was even said to have attained supernormal powers through his austerities, he grew to be a bitter man, constantly plotting against the Buddha. Devadatta never learned that when we fight against others we always lose.

One day, driven by hatred, he released a cobra into the hermitage where the Buddha was meditating. Death from cobra bite is almost immediate, and Devadatta returned the next day expecting to see the Blessed One lying dead. Instead, he saw the cobra, the messenger of death, with its hood raised over the Buddha to protect him from the burning rays of the sun.

Don't think that Devadatta was a mediocre aspirant. He had outstanding qualities that attracted the admiration of other dedicated monks and even princes. Even Ajatashatru, the son of King Bimbisara, the ruler of Magadha, was impressed by the magic powers of the monk Devadatta and became his devoted

disciple. It was to be a tragic association between the prince and the monk, for they began to plan together how they could seize power for themselves.

## A sinister plan

They hit upon a sinister plan: Devadatta would become the head of the order and Ajatashatru would replace his father on the throne of Magadha. When he heard rumors of this tragic plot, rather than oppose his son, King Bimbisara abdicated, for he was deeply drawn to the Buddha and wanted to follow the spiritual life. He installed Ajatashatru as ruler, saying, “This is what you want, so I give it to you.”

Bimbisara left the palace with his mind at peace, but Devadatta still thought of him as a threat. So day after day Devadatta urged Ajatashatru to imprison his father. Soon it came to pass as Devadatta desired, and Bimbisara was imprisoned by his son. On that day, because of his evil thoughts, Devadatta lost all of his supernormal powers. Also on that day Devadatta began in earnest to fulfill his plan to become master of the order.

Knowing that he had the support of King Ajatashatru, and thinking that the Buddha was now old and incapable of resistance, Devadatta went to the assembly of the monks and said that it was time for the old man to find peace by retiring to the forest, leaving Devadatta in charge. The Buddha replied quietly that he wouldn’t consider putting even Sariputta or Moggallana in charge, much less Devadatta. But, as we have seen, Devadatta was not lacking in magnetism, so when he invited the monks to leave the Buddha and follow him, many listened.

After a few days, the Buddha sent Sariputta and Moggallana to

bring back these foolish monks, who by that time were eager to rejoin the Buddha. When Devadatta discovered all the monks had left him, he fell ill. Knowing he was about to die, he wished to see the Buddha one last time and started on the journey in a litter because he was too weak to walk. On his journey, according to the chronicles, he asked that the litter be placed on the banks of a pond, and when he stepped out to wash, the earth opened and quicksand swallowed him. It was his fate, the sutras say, to be reborn in a hellish world because of his great misdeeds. But as he was dying he called on the Buddha for refuge, and therefore the immense burden of his karma was lightened to a great extent.

### The enemy we have to face with courage

Ajatashatru too repented of his evil deeds after the death of his father. As he grew older he had no peace and was tormented by terrifying dreams. Finally, in great fear, he went to the Buddha, who received him kindly and listened to his confession. The Buddha eased the king's mind, bestowing peace upon him, but after he departed, in great sorrow the Compassionate One told the monks that if Ajatashatru had not been guilty of such great crimes he would have gone far, far along the path to enlightenment in that very life. The Buddha said, "He is a man wounded by his own arrow."

The sad story of Devadatta teaches an age-old lesson: as long as we attack others under the foolish belief that the enemy is outside, we can never be victorious. The real enemy is within all of us. This is the enemy we have to face with courage and then defeat. Gird yourself up to fight, the Buddha would say; the

battle is already joined! Don't try to run away. The enemy is all that is base in us, all that is greedy, selfish, and separate. This is the real enemy, who hides within and deceives us by warning, "Look out! The enemy is waiting for you outside."

## The real conquerors

Those who have conquered ten thousand enemies, what glory do they have? What valor? Those who conquer themselves, who conquer every vestige of selfishness and separateness in their hearts, are the real conquerors, because their life is victorious.

Many spiritual teachers use the language of war as the Buddha does now. Mara, who represents all the forces of darkness, is ranged against you. Don't try to avoid the fight, because it is inescapable. You cannot afford to withdraw from the fight. You cannot say, "I'm going to drop out, get into a cave, and put up a sign saying Nobody Here." You cannot avoid fighting, but you can choose the enemy. If you choose to fight others, heads you lose, tails you lose. If you choose to fight yourself, heads you win, tails you win.

One who has conquered a thousand times a thousand people is no conqueror. He has brought only misery to a thousand times a thousand people, laid waste the land, broken the hearts of widows and children. How can such a person claim to be victorious? It's a cruel question, which should force us to rewrite history and remove titles like "conqueror" and "great" from those who attacked other nations or exploited other races. Only if you have wiped out every trace of selfishness from your consciousness, the Buddha says marvelously, can you call yourself a hero. 🌸

## If You Want to Draw Near to God

*Abu Sa'id*

If you want to draw near to God,  
seek him in the hearts of those around you.  
Speak well of all, present or absent.  
If you would be a light for others,  
be like the sun: show the same face to all.  
To bring joy to a single heart is better  
than building countless shrines for worship;  
to capture one heart through kindness is better  
than setting a thousand free.  
This is the true lover of God,  
who lives with others,  
rises and eats and sleeps like others,  
gives and takes with others in the bazaar,  
yet never forgets God even for a moment.

# Ten Tips on Finding Strength & Courage in Turbulent Times

Ekanath Easwaran, from a selection of his books

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1. Success on the spiritual path requires the highest kind of courage we can muster, for every ounce of our strength and resolution will be tested.
2. 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.
3. The way we respond to small matters reflects the way we will respond to the larger matters of life. If we can begin to release ourselves from our little likes and dislikes, we will find that we are gaining the capacity to weather emotional storms. Then we can begin to face whatever comes calmly and courageously.
4. In this age of mass media, we need to be particularly discriminating in what we read and what we go to see for entertainment, for we become in part what our senses take in.
5. We all can render a great service by listening to opposing opinions without agitation, discourtesy, or violence, and by offering our opinions not as nonnegotiable demands but as calm, courteous statements.
6. Concentrate on your own personal conduct. Don't allow your attention to wander to how rude the other person is; concentrate on not being rude yourself. It is terribly difficult, but it frees you to choose your response.

7. Just as we admire people who can lift a thousand pounds, we all benefit by being with somebody who can be patient under attack, kind when opposed, and detached enough to see the situation clearly and compassionately. This is not a sign of weakness; it's a sign of immense strength.
8. Whenever a negative emotion starts to rise – a wisp of anxiety or fear, a rush of anger – if you can immediately start repeating your mantram in your mind, that gives the mind something to hold on to. If you can continue to hold on to the mantram at such times, the energy in that emotion is transformed, very much the way the energy of a rushing river is transformed into electricity. That is the secret of the mantram's power.
9. The man or woman who practices the teachings of these great scriptures will become aware of the unity of life, and this awareness will give constant strength and inspiration to those who seek to turn anger into compassion, fear into courage, and selfishness into self-forgetfulness in the joy of the whole.
10. So don't be intimidated by position or power or wealth. If little people like you and me work together, we can do a great deal to transform the world. Taken together, these small daily efforts to improve our ordinary lives add up to a very powerful force that, in the years to come, can become a kind of spiritual revolution, providing a firm foundation for the kind of political, economic, and ecological improvements we need to make.



In loving memory of Christine Easwaran, 1921–2022

# You Are a Force for Peace

Christine Easwaran

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Great teachers in every religion and every age have told us that goodness is as much a part of life as the force of gravity. The world would not endure for a single day without it.

Somerset Maugham echoes this great truth in his enormously popular novel *The Razor's Edge*, published in 1943 in the midst of World War II. Referring to the story's main character, Maugham said, "Goodness is the strongest force in the world, and Larry has got it."

Larry is a young American whose experience of war prompts a long search for meaning. By the end of the novel, his life is completely changed; but he has no philosophy to teach, only the desire to lead an ordinary life ennobled by what he has learned. A friend challenges him: "Can you for a moment imagine that you, one man, can have any effect?"

"I can try," Larry replies. "Nothing that happens is without effect. If you throw a stone in a pond the universe isn't quite the same as it was before . . . It may be that if I live the life I've planned for myself it may affect others; the effect may be no greater than the ripple caused by a stone thrown in a pond, but one ripple causes another, and that one a third; it's just possible that a few people will see that my way of life offers happiness and peace, and that they in turn will teach what they have learnt to others."

We should never underestimate the effect of one person remaining calm in the midst of turmoil, the power of one person to change ill will into good will, anger into compassion, hatred into love.

I do earnestly believe that the greatest danger that faces us today is fear and hatred. In words that belong to the whole world, the Prayer of Saint Francis tells how each of us can be a peacemaker in his or her own circle – an island for those around us, a force for peace, a shield against fear and anger.

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy.

## You are a force for peace

The first step is to bring calm to your own mind so you don't add fuel to the flames of fear and anger around you. Keep the Prayer of Saint Francis in front of you. Put it on your desk.

Don't let it become stale. Write it out. Memorize it. Repeat it to yourself whenever you feel overwhelmed. Give it to your friends. Keep it in your wallet. Teach it to your children. Recite it out loud. Put it on your refrigerator door.

## You are a force for peace

Don't get caught in angry, frightened talk. Choose what goes into your mind; don't leave it to the media. Don't let hostility and resentment take over your life. Step away from the whirlpools of negativity that swirl around us.

## You are a force for peace

Do something positive — every day. Take control of your life. Get together with your family and friends. Read elevating spiritual literature. Read with your children.

## You are a force for peace

Slow down. Stay focused. Pay attention to the needs of the people around you. Be kind and considerate. At home and at work, help create an atmosphere of trust and openness. Reach out to those you feel have offended you.

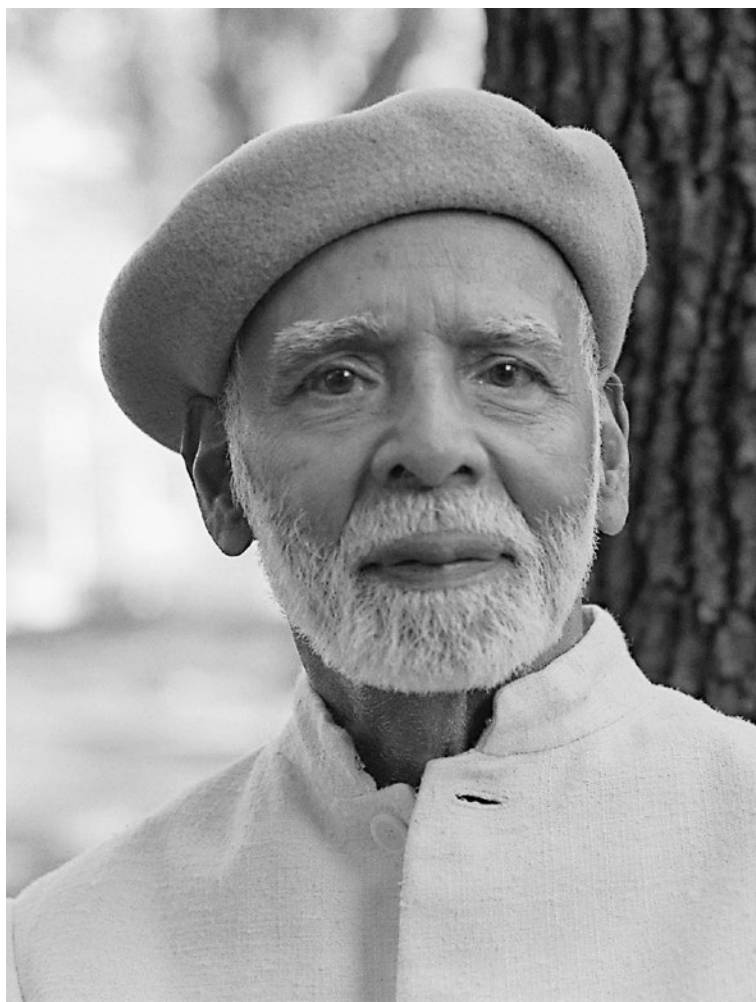
## You are a force for peace

Choose a mantram. Repeat it silently to yourself whenever you can — while washing the dishes, while waiting in line. Repeat it whenever you start to get angry, upset, or afraid. Combine it often with a good, fast walk. Fall asleep repeating it so it stays with you throughout the night. Write it out by hand — fill a page or two with it every day. Write it for the whole world. Keep a little book for that purpose and carry it with you everywhere.

## You are a force for peace

Teach your mantram to your children. Get them to repeat it whenever they can. Tell them it chases fears away. Show them how powerful it is by using it with them to keep calm. Tell them they too are a force for peace and the mantram can be their shield.

Keep reminding yourself that goodness is the strongest force in the world. 🌸



Eknath Easwaran, 1990s

# We Are Not Alone

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

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I have often said that to understand Gandhi, we have to understand the Gita. But the reverse is also true: to grasp the Gita, it is a great help to understand Gandhi. One of his most revolutionary contributions is that evil has no lasting reality. What is real is the underlying unity we call God, because it cannot be erased, cannot be altered, cannot be taken away. Here is the practical application: evil is real only insofar as we support it. If you stand in front of the sun, don't you cast a shadow? There is darkness on the path; yet the sun still shines, and if you remove the obstruction to its light, the shadow disappears. Evil is a kind of shadow, the absence of light. It can disappear when what obstructs the light is removed. Each person who says or does or even connives at evil, therefore, bears a terrible responsibility: for the time being, he or she is helping to make that unreal evil real. As we withdraw our support — of unkindness, injustice, violence, exploitation, war — these evils will cease to exist.

From this perspective, every problem in the world has its final solution in withdrawing our personal support. Here Gandhi comes home to every one of us. We don't have to look to presidents or prime ministers to solve these problems; we don't have to look to leaders or experts in any sphere. We look to ourselves. If, in my own life, I can withdraw support from everything that violates the unity of life, I have reduced evil by one measure. This is much more than a negative contribution. It releases a tremendous positive force which finds expression

in our work, our relationships, and our priorities. As that force spreads, it begins to change the lives of those around us.

This is where Gandhi really glorifies the individual. Truth, he maintained, does not need strength of numbers. Too many followers can actually be a hindrance; a crowd or a majority can be swept away. If only one person can turn from evil completely, in action, word, and even thought, he or she alone can change the world. Toward the end of his life, Gandhi was sometimes asked how he had managed to bring down the greatest empire the world had known. Gandhi replied in effect, “What makes you say *I* did it? I was only an instrument.” He was trying to tell us that God – truth, love, unity – is always present. By emptying himself of himself, he became a vehicle through which these forces could work. Wherever this happens, though it may take time, other hearts cannot help but respond. The Lord dwells in every one of us, and “deep calleth unto deep.”

## Surrounded by creative powers

When we look at the forces arrayed against us, it is only natural to ask how our small contribution can work against these impossible odds. Sri Krishna would object, “What makes you think that you are working alone?” Just as physical forces like gravitation are always operating, love, truth, and compassion operate everywhere, under all circumstances. Gravitation is not something added to the world; it is part of its very fabric. Similarly, love and unity are part of the fabric of life, part of its very nature. Just as we respond to these forces, others too will respond. We see only a tiny part of the stage: one corner in space, moment by moment in time. We can act, the Gita

reminds us over and over, but we cannot dictate the fruits of our action. “Just do your best,” Sri Krishna says; “then leave the results to me.”

Even in our own sadhana, this brings immense reassurance. Spiritual disciplines are terribly difficult, and illumination almost impossible for an ordinary human being – I would say, even for a remarkable human being. The main reason why it can be achieved, even by little people like us, is that these cosmic forces are at work, helping everybody who undertakes this heroic task. Without these forces, there would be no future for the world.

In these dark times, therefore, I would like every one of you to remember this: we are not alone. This is not a world of chance, with “neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.” We are surrounded by creative powers, as surrounded as we are by air and light and gravitation. It is only when we fail to ally ourselves with the forces of light that they are unable to support us. If we give our wholehearted support, love *will* triumph. This remembrance brings faith; it brings hope; it brings the certitude of victory. 🌸



Ramagiri Ashram



Ramagiri Ashram

## 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 and video and audio recordings of his talks, and offers retreats and other 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/](http://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/](http://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

### 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/](http://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.

### Returnee Workshop:

October 5

### Weeklong Retreat:

October 18–22

### Introductory Weekend Retreat:

September 27–29

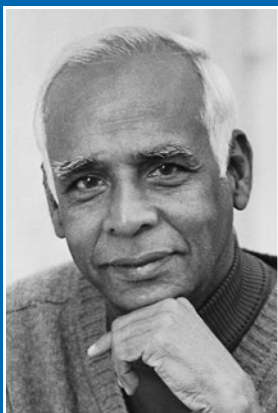
### Returnee Weekend Retreat:

November 8–10

### Setu (Senior) Retreat:

September 13–17

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



Little people like you and me may not be a Gandhi, a St. Francis, or a St. Teresa, but if we do everything we can to still our mind and subdue our self-will, the Lord can light the lamp of wisdom within so that we, too, can contribute a little light instead of adding to the darkness of our times.

— Eknath Easwaran

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