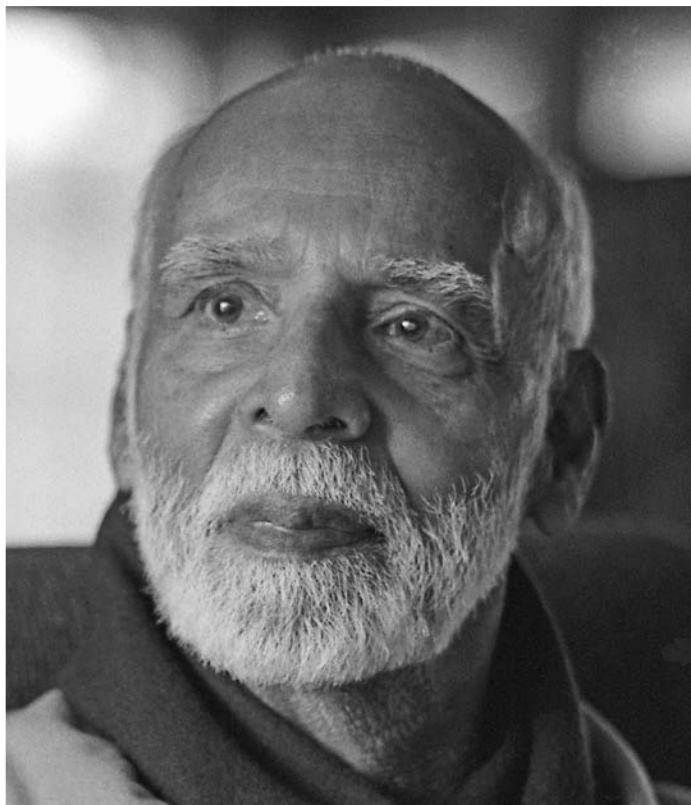


Eknath Easwaran on Meditation & Spiritual Living

Blue Mountain Journal

SPECIAL ISSUE 2024



Deepening Faith

Finding the Self Within

In This Issue

In this issue Easwaran talks about a “stubbornly practical” approach to faith. After describing himself as a man of profound faith in God, he says, “I’ve never taken anything on faith that I could not test against my own experience. . . . But that faith is the fruit of a long period of effort and clear observation—and, I would add, an open mind.”

Easwaran uses a Sanskrit term for faith, *shraddha*, “the basis of how one looks at life.” He tells us that “if we can change what we believe, we can change what we become—and thereby, if only a little, change the world around us.”

The articles and community stories in this issue show how faith takes root in our hearts and grows. “Through the practice of meditation,” Easwaran writes, “we can learn to withdraw our trust from the things that separate us from others—wealth and pleasure, power and prestige—and place it more and more in what contributes to the welfare of us all.”

– The BMCM Editorial Team

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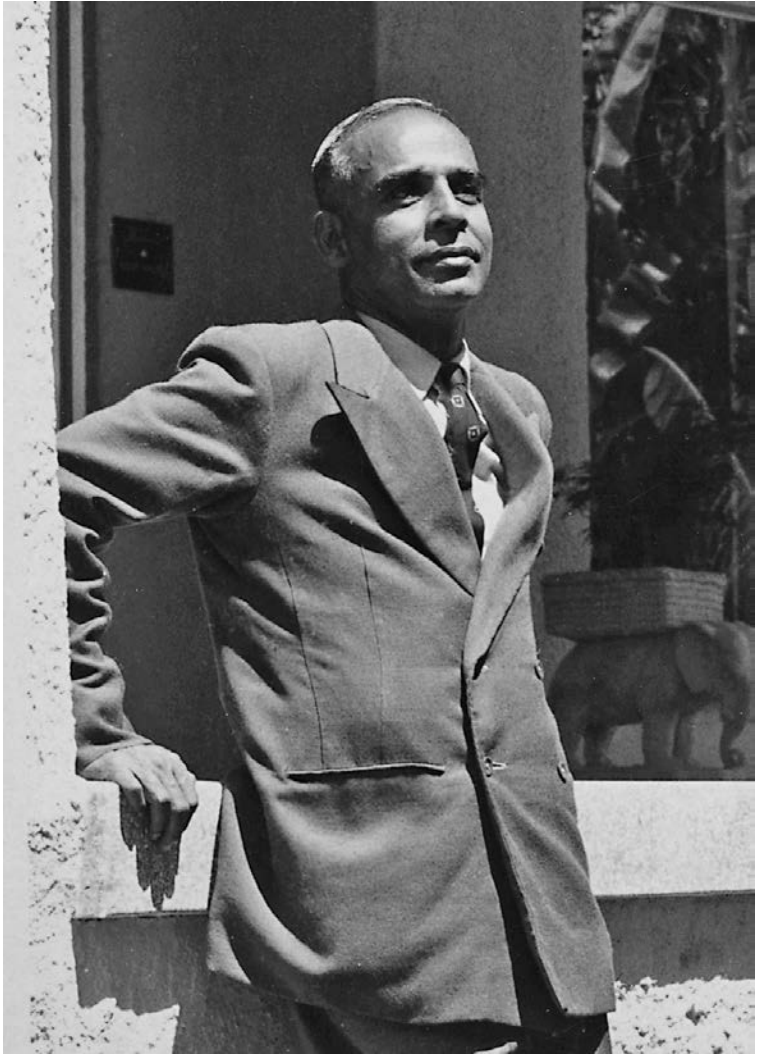
A Deep Belief Based on Personal Experience

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

If I haven't come to have faith in the Lord within, who is my real Self, then how can I be secure? How can I be at peace? How can I live for others or be loved by others? Here "faith," or *shraddha* in Sanskrit, does not mean mere blind faith, but a deep belief based on personal experience.

When we lead the spiritual life, we will begin to see an inner power guiding and protecting us in even the most difficult situations. When we experience this over and over again, we come to have a deep faith or *shraddha* in the Lord within. It is not enough if we have blind faith in spiritual ideals, based on the testimony of the scriptures or sages. We must realize these truths for ourselves, in our own life and consciousness. As the Buddha was fond of saying, the spiritual teacher only points the way; we must do our own traveling. The personal experience of others may plant the seed of *shraddha* in our hearts, inspiring us to lead the spiritual life, but *shraddha* can develop fully only if we experience these truths for ourselves.





Easwaran, 1960s

We Are What Our Shraddha Is

Ekknath Easwaran, from *Essence of the Bhagavad Gita*

“Faith” is a problematic word, because religious faith has become so badly confused with fanaticism and seems opposed to reason. In fact, what I mean here is poles apart from fanaticism and complements reason. “Faith” is an inadequate translation of the Sanskrit word *shraddha*—another of those important terms with no equivalent in any language I know of. Generally speaking, *shraddha* is the basis of how one looks at life. It means not just faith and beliefs but assumptions, conditioning, motivation, personal capacity, and the particular stage in evolution that one has reached, both individually and in the long arc of spiritual growth.

We depend on faith all the time in a million ways small and large throughout every day; we couldn’t take a step without it. We show faith in physics whenever we cross a bridge, and faith in economics (of all things) when we accept slips of paper in exchange for goods or services. We show faith daily in doctors and medicines; we believe scientists who tell us absurd-sounding things about warped space and the first few seconds of creation and matter disappearing down holes in the sky; and of course we show all kinds of misplaced trust too, in politicians’ promises and get-rich-quick schemes and the assurances of those who tell us what we want to believe about “wars to end war” and “energy too cheap to meter.”

We become what we believe

The sum of what each of us believes tells a great deal about who we are. In fact, the Gita says, it is what we are. The Bible says the same thing: “As a man thinks in his heart, so he is.” We are what we believe; we become what we believe—most critically in what we believe we are.

It follows that if we can change what we believe, we can change what we become—and thereby, if only a little, change the world around us.

Let me give some simple illustrations. In the village where I grew up, the monsoon rains bring hundreds of frogs to cluster around our temple pools at night and sing their throaty chorus. And every night during the monsoon season, particularly at nightfall, snakes come out—some of them huge—and try to catch a frog or two and swallow it alive. It was ghastly to listen to, and even as a little boy I wasn’t able to sleep with those frogs crying for help and me unable to do anything. During the day, if I saw a big snake eyeing a frog and the frog looking at me with mute appeal as if to say, “Save me,” I used to leave my friends and jump in to scare the snake away. My classmates laughed at me. “It’s just going to come back again,” they’d say. “Why should you take sides like that and deprive the snake of its food?” I didn’t know how to answer, but my grandmother did: “It is a snake’s dharma to kill. Your dharma is to save.”

This is a very basic shraddha: the belief, deep below the surface level of consciousness, that we have come into life to give and not to hurt, to help and not to harm.

You can change your shraddha

Everybody, including a little child, has shraddha. I don't think there is any human being who can function in life without shraddha. It can be wrong shraddha; then they function wrongly. It can be right shraddha; then they function rightly. But the message of the Gita is that if your shraddha is low, you can elevate it; if your shraddha is selfish, you can change it to selfless; if your shraddha is violent, you can make it nonviolent. To me this is the glory of the human being: not our technological accomplishments, no matter how laudable, but the fact that there is nobody who cannot change the meanest shraddha into something noble.

The word *shraddha* can be taken as meaning literally "that which is placed in the heart." To make a bad Sanskrit pun, for years my shraddha was *shirodha*, "that which is placed in the head": higher education. We all know that that which is placed in the head is often not of much significance in everyday life. This began to puzzle me even before I took to meditation. As a graduate student, whenever a famous author or scholar came to campus to speak I would be seated right in front to take in everything they said. But when they started taking questions, I'd suddenly realize that my unlettered grandmother could give much wiser answers. And that baffled me. Here were men and women with stellar educations, yet on topics like how to live they seemed so immature and misleading.

But my shraddha was that whatever is placed in your head is what you are. That's what I was building my life on. That's how I looked at life. Those were the people I respected; those were the people I wanted to emulate. Having spent sixteen

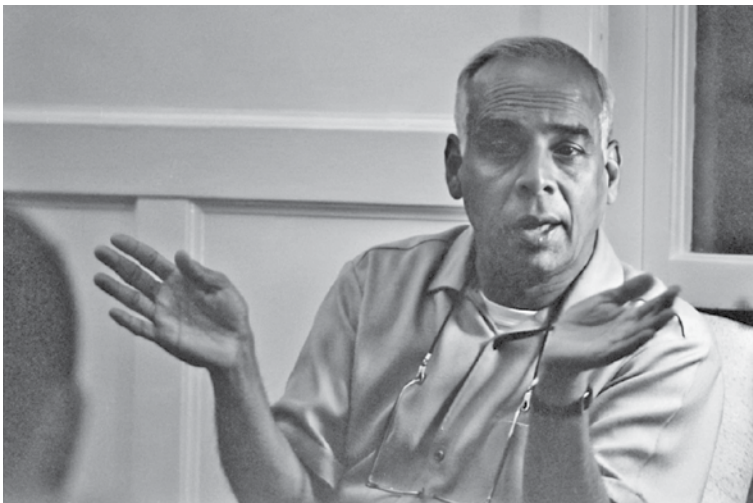
or seventeen years undergoing all this brainstuffing, it was cvshattering to take these idols off their pedestals and put them away in the attic with the old copies of *Punch* and broken toys.

Intense desire can achieve impossible things

Another example, this time dealing with something that seems impossible: ice skating. Coming from South India, I cannot take two steps on ice. I cannot take even one step; that would be the beginning and end of my skating. I have tried. In Minneapolis, when I first saw that ol' Mississippi River turn to ice, I couldn't believe it. I had read about such things, Hans Brinker and all that, but to me the dharma of a river was to flow. Here it had not just stopped flowing but turned solid, while even little children flew about on the surface dancing and twirling and doing impossible things.

Yet years later, when Christine and I took our nieces to a skating rink in California, I began to understand that anybody, even someone like me, could learn to skate if he or she just put in the effort. If I had been born in Minneapolis instead of South India, and spent my time on the skating rink instead of in rivers and on soccer fields, my "ice shraddha" would have been very different. I would have had faith that this is something that can be learned. You can see this shraddha in champion athletes and performers: if you want something badly enough, you won't let anything come in the way. That's an elementary shraddha, but it illustrates the faith that intense desire can achieve impossible things.

Ice skating is a trivial example, but the point is far-reaching. I am old enough to remember when it was considered



Easwaran, 1960s

physiologically impossible for a human being to run a mile in less than four minutes. Virtually everyone believed this, while the world record crept closer and closer to an invisible barrier that could not be crossed—until Roger Bannister came along with a different shraddha and turned in a time of three minutes and fifty-nine-plus seconds in 1954. Then the old shraddha of impossibility fell away. It takes very little to dismiss this kind of faith: just one person is enough.

Change our image of ourselves

The most important instance of shraddha, then, is the image we have of ourselves in our hearts—the paradigm of personality, if you like, which governs what we will seek in life, the purpose we will follow, the very basis of our pattern of living. The Gita sums it up quietly:

Every creature is born with faith of some kind, either sattvic, rajasic, or tamasic. . . . Our faith conforms to our nature, Arjuna. Human nature is made of faith. A person is what his shraddha is. (17:2-3)

We are what our shraddha is—and since virtually all of us believe we are physical creatures, so we spend our lives seeking physical satisfaction. The challenge of the Gita is to slowly change our image of ourselves from wholly physical to essentially spiritual. It is when we start trying to do this in the depths of the unconscious that the real war within begins.

Don't look for any shortcuts

At this point there can be an impulse to run away by plunging into distracting activities and fresh entanglements. But—just as for Arjuna in this war—it's too late now to run away. We can take our time exploring any number of byways; they are all going to be blind alleys. Finally we realize there is only one thing to do: take it on. Your mind will assure you that you can't make it. Don't listen: that's not you; it's the voice of a ventriloquist, the ego, whose separateness is being threatened. If you couldn't make it, you would never have got this far. But don't look for any shortcuts, any speedy solutions; there aren't any.

What does it mean to regulate the unconscious? Sri Krishna uses a significant word, *shanti*, for which “peace” is a very inadequate translation. Shanti is “the peace that passes understanding.” It refers to a state of mind in which all desires are fulfilled, all conflicts resolved, and all fears banished. The practical significance is that once we reach this state, we can enter

into the unconscious and bid any storm that is brewing there to be quiet. All thoughts can be quietened. We don't have to tell anger or fear or greed to be quiet; we just say, like Jesus in the storm, "Be still," and stillness reigns.

In my village school, when a teacher entered the room and said, "Children, be quiet," we were expected to stop whatever we were doing and give our full attention. But the unconscious is pandemonium. No teacher has ever been there; there is not even any school. We have to build the school, prescribe the curriculum, and then train the mind every day, just as if it were starting kindergarten. When I was small, we had to learn the multiplication tables up to times sixteen, not only forwards but backwards too. Just try doing that! We had to recite every evening after class or else we couldn't go home. No sophisticated educational psychology; we just learned.

Training the unconscious is like that. When you go on repeating something over and over, it becomes natural. As Gandhi said, it requires the patience of someone trying to empty the sea with a cup—but it works. Finally, even if someone shakes you out of deep sleep in the middle of the night and says something rude, you won't be rude in return. Even in your most befuddled intellectual moods, love surges: you know you cannot hurt anyone; you know you cannot be unkind. You can't be taken unawares.

Turn a hurricane around

To do this, however, requires tremendous focus. All desires must be unified. Each of us has millions of little desires, and every desire has a certain force in it; it is the force of all these

millions of little desires unified that enables you to open the door into the unconscious. When you have had a serious quarrel, for example, you know what happens when you try to read or watch a movie; the force of your anger scatters your attention to the winds. How do we deal with these unconscious hurricanes? Arjuna asks for us:

O Krishna, the stillness of divine union that you describe is beyond my comprehension. How can the mind, which is so restless, attain lasting peace? The mind is restless, turbulent, powerful, violent; trying to control it is like trying to tame the wind. (6:33-34)

In meditation, this is just what we are trying to do: turn a hurricane around so that it blows in the opposite direction. Beneath the conscious level, anger, fear, and selfish desire are blowing constantly in every human being. But their action isn't predetermined; they blow in the direction they do because that is our conditioning. If these winds are turned around, their energy is transformed. Anger raging in at a hundred miles per hour will come out as compassion—still blowing at a hundred miles per hour. Lust blasting in at a hundred miles per hour will come out as love for all. There is no loss of power, but now it is beneficial rather than destructive.

Arjuna complains that this cannot be done. Krishna replies that it can, if we only keep trying:

It is true that the mind is restless and difficult to control. But it can be conquered, Arjuna, through regular practice and detachment. Those who lack self-control will find it difficult to progress in meditation; but those who are



Easwaran, 1960s

self-controlled, striving earnestly through the right means,
will attain the goal. (6:35-36)

In the long view

Yet here, at the very end of the Gita, he confides that in the long view we have very little choice. Like Arjuna, we are there on the battlefield already:

If you say in your self-will, “I will not fight this battle,” your resolve will be useless; your own nature will drive you into it. (18:59)

It’s a terrible verse. If we refuse to fight the battle of life, our own karma will drive us into it. If we refuse to walk against the

wind of conditioning, if we don't like getting sand in our eyes, eventually our own nature will make us change direction. The consequences of our thought and actions—karma—will drive us forward. That's what sorrow does. If we avoid fighting what is selfish in us, the consequences build up—the consequences of violating dharma, of ignoring the unity of life. Sooner or later, the very weight of our suffering will force us finally to turn and walk against the wind because that is the only way to find refuge. Here, Sri Krishna is appealing, "Why not do this now? Why wait till you can hardly walk and the storm is raging around you?"

*

You were marked for Self-realization

At the end, once this struggle is over and the war is won, you will look back and see that everything in your life from birth on—being born in such a family, in such a place, going to such a school, having this kind of teachers and that kind of friends, playing with the toys of life till your fingers are burned to the second knuckle and not letting go until everything you're trying to hold on to is swept away, and you want to get free so passionately that you will risk whatever it costs—when all that is past and you have reached your goal, you see that from the day you were born you were marked for Self-realization. You were born with that destiny; all of us are.

So when we try to hold on to money, the market crashes: we're not supposed to get caught there. We cultivate a meaningful relationship and the object of our desire goes and joins the Peace Corps—well, we're meant for a vastly higher

consummation. This goes on and on, heartbreak after heartbreak, until we learn to read the code. Only then can we understand that all this suffering is what enabled us to turn our backs on our personal happiness and live for the welfare of the whole—in which, of course, our own personal welfare is included.

A real leap of faith

But we have got to stake everything we have. We can't hold back even one little thing, however small:

The Lord dwells in the heart of all creatures and whirls them around upon the wheel of maya. Run to him for refuge with all your strength, and peace profound will be yours through his grace.

Be aware of me always, adore me, make every act an offering to me, and you shall come to me; this I promise, for you are dear to me. Abandon all supports and look to me for protection. I shall purify you from the sins of the past; do not grieve. (18:61–62, 65–66)

This is the hallmark of the Gita: complete self-reliance, no dependence on any support except the Self, the Lord within. As long as we try to prop ourselves up with possessions and people, we have no freedom, and the props are guaranteed to fail. Sooner or later we have to learn to rely on the Self alone.

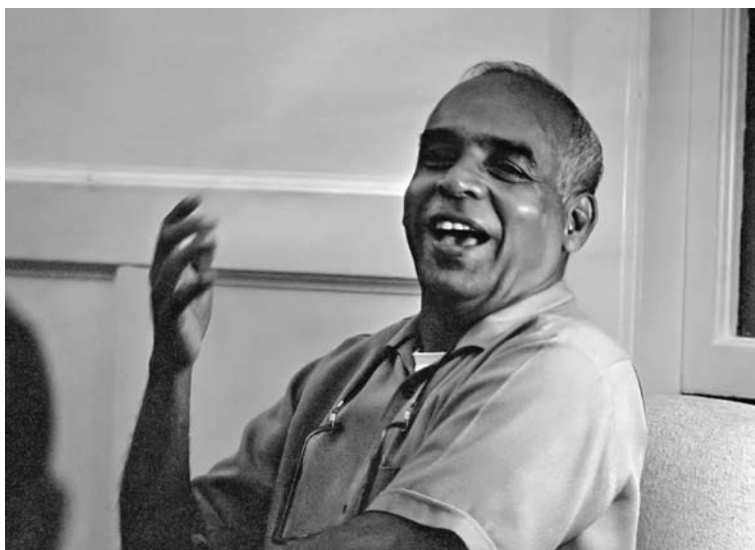
Letting go like this requires a real leap of faith. Being cautious, businesslike people, we say, “Lord, please give me Self-realization first; then I promise I’ll throw the props away.” This is the real problem. Sri Krishna says, “That’s not the way

business is done here. You throw them away first and then we'll see." We say, "And then you promise?" And he smiles and says, "No promises." That's the test. You not only stand to lose the cash in hand but to lose the credit also. And for some reason not known to me, there comes a point where you just don't mind—where you give whatever the cost. That's why mystics all talk the language of love: even in romance, it is the mark of all-consuming love to stake everything on a chance of attaining the beloved.

There is really nothing to lose

I have to admit that in this transaction Sri Krishna stands to get a lemon. What have we really got to give away? Frustration, insecurity, frittering away time in shopping centers . . . there is really nothing to lose. But at the time it seems everything, and the purpose of having to stake everything we hold on to, if I may so put it, is to unify consciousness—to love “with all our heart and all our mind and all our spirit and all our strength” so that we let go of ourselves. This all-consuming passion is why the Gita praises bhakti yoga, the way of love, as the surest and swiftest path to Self-realization:

Those who set their hearts on me and worship me with unfailing devotion and faith are more established in yoga. [For] hazardous and slow is the path to the Unrevealed, difficult for physical creatures to tread. But they for whom I am the supreme goal, who do all work renouncing self for me and meditate on me with singlehearted devotion, these I will swiftly rescue from the fragment's cycle of birth and death, for their consciousness has entered into me. (12:2, 5–7)



Easwaran, 1960s

The Ishta or “chosen ideal”

I ask myself why Sri Krishna thrills every fiber of my being. It is not only during the day that my mind clings to him, but even when I am sound asleep. In the Hindu tradition, this is the concept of the Ishta or “chosen ideal”: the form of God that answers to the heart’s deepest desire. I mentioned earlier how diverse the Hindu tradition seems in its unity: my grandmother had her vision of God as Rama; for my mother it was Shiva; for me it is Krishna—the same truth, the same divinity, revealed in different ways in response to deep needs which can be completely fulfilled only by a particular personality of the Godhead. When love for this supreme ideal has consumed every personal desire in the heart, Self-realization is only a matter of time. 🌸



Ramagiri Ashram

Unshakable Faith

Swami Ramdas

Unshakable faith in God and His will:

Nothing short of this.

Take thorough refuge in Him.

Give up all fears,

all anxieties, all doubts,

all thoughts of weakness.

You have put yourself under the guidance and control
of an all-powerful being.

Let Him do what He pleases with you.

Give up *I* and *mine*. Make no plans.

Let nothing of the past or future disturb you.

God is the sole doer and you are His child, His servant.

Your *I* and *mine* has no existence. It is all He, He alone.

Submit, resign, surrender yourself to Him.

Be always cheerful, peaceful, and blissful. In this state
you will always remain. This is your goal.

God is always in you and you are always in Him.

He and you are one. This is the truth.

Midas: A Story of Shraddha

Ek Nath Easwaran, from *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*

The ancient Greek story about Midas is a story of shraddha. Midas was obsessed with gold. He may have thought he was a man of many interests—music, horticulture, Olympian wines—but in the depths of his consciousness, his deepest belief was that wealth is the source of all joy. He found himself thinking about gold, dreaming about gold, wanting gold more and more as time went on. Gradually, without realizing it, he was thinking about nothing else. He wanted everything he touched to be turned to gold, just as there are people who want everything they do to make them a profit or bring them a little power or pleasure.

And—so the story goes—the gods granted his desire. Midas got up one morning, picked up his toothbrush, and in an instant it turned to gold. Midas was ecstatic. In delight he hopped around touching everything in his palace and watching it turn to gold.

After a while, however, the novelty wore off, and Midas sat down to have some breakfast. He tried some grapes, but they turned to gold. So did his toast, and his egg, and even his Greek coffee. Midas was a little irritated; he was hungry, and he had enough imagination to suspect that there might not be much future in eating now that he had this golden touch. It raised some questions which he didn't feel like thinking about before breakfast.

A little subdued, he went out to his garden to take his mind off his stomach. It was a beautiful Mediterranean morning. The roses he had been cultivating so carefully were still filled with the first liquid rays of the sun. Their beauty took him by surprise, and he

bent over to pick one for his table. But in an instant the lovely petals turned into harsh, cold metal.

Midas was beginning to get the picture. He threw the gold rose into the bushes and muttered some bad Greek. Then, suddenly, he looked up and saw his little daughter running to greet him. Her smile was so bright that he forgot all about his golden toast and his golden rose, and he reached down joyfully to take her into his arms. The instant he touched her, she too turned into gold, leaving only a lifeless statue for him to love.

At last Midas understood. Weeping, he fell to the ground and begged the gods to take away his curse.

Most of us, fortunately, are not as obsessed as Midas was. But his fate is not as fanciful as it might seem. Midas's shraddha was in gold; for others it might be property, or power, or personal pleasure, but the result is very much the same. When we get caught in these things, we begin to mold our lives around them. All our capacity to love is trapped in getting what we desire, and without really wanting to, we begin to treat those around us as only figures in a game. Seen through our shraddha, they are scarcely real at all, and there are people who spend their whole lives together without ever really seeing each other, just because of their preoccupation with themselves.

There is no point in blaming people like this; to some extent, this is the conditioning of our times, and all of us have been affected by it. But all of us have the capacity to change our shraddha. Through the practice of meditation, we can learn to withdraw our trust from the things that separate us from others—wealth and pleasure, power and prestige—and place it more and more in what contributes to the welfare of us all. 🌸

Evening Prayer for the Sabbath

Jewish Liturgy

In this moment of silent communion with Thee,
O Lord, a still small voice speaks in the depth
of my spirit.

It speaks to me of the things I must do to attain
holy kinship with Thee and to grow
in the likeness of Thee.

I must do my allotted task with unflagging faithfulness
even though the eye of no taskmaster is on me.

I must be gentle in the face of ingratitude
or when slander distorts my noblest motives.

I must come to the end of each day with a feeling
that I have used its gifts gratefully
and faced its trials bravely.

O Lord, help me to be ever more like Thee,
holy for Thou art holy,
loving for Thou art love.

Speak to me, then, Lord, as I seek Thee again and again
in the stillness of meditation, until Thy bidding
shall at last become for me a hallowed discipline,
a familiar way of life.

The Path

Mahatma Gandhi

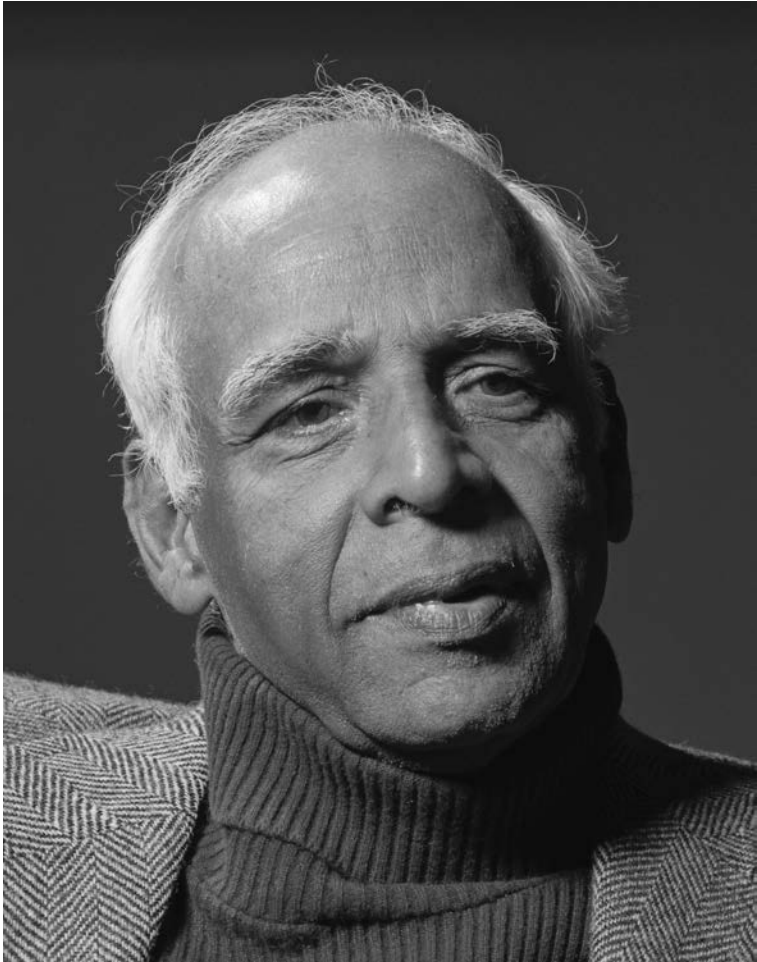
I know the path: it is strait and narrow.
It is like the edge of a sword.

I rejoice to walk on it.
I weep when I slip.

God's word is:
"He who strives never perishes."

I have implicit faith in that promise.

Though, therefore, from my weakness
I fail a thousand times,
I shall not lose faith.



Easwaran, 1970s

Stupendous Mastery

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

Drawing upon your deepest resources, you shall overcome all difficulties through my grace. But if you will not heed me in your self-will, nothing will avail you. (18:58)

Some years ago, when the “Treasures of Tutankhamen” exhibit came to San Francisco from the museum at Cairo, I read a little about how these treasures were discovered. It has all the ingredients for a great short story. After six years of fruitless digging, the English archaeologist Howard Carter was routinely checking an unpromising plot of land in the Valley of the Kings when he uncovered stone stairs leading down to a secret tunnel. The passage showed the familiar signs of tomb-robbers breaking in and departing in haste.

But at the far end, barely visible in the darkness, was a sealed door. Breathlessly Carter managed to make enough of a hole to admit a candle. As the flame flared up, its light glinted off gold and jewels: the little room was full of the treasures of a king. Beyond he would discover other rooms with even more dazzling riches, the greatest treasure trove in Egyptian archaeology.

When you finally reach a certain deep level in meditation, you feel much the way Carter must have felt when he first peered through that door, which had not been touched for three thousand years. As I said, I was not aware I had any tremendous latent capacities; no one is. But after many years of meditation, when I finally gained access to this treasury in consciousness, I couldn't believe what I found.

Correcting a wrong shraddha

Until then, I had thought I had at most a little piggy bank, full of nickels and dimes of prana that I'd been able to pick up. On special occasions—usually when I wanted to answer some urgent personal call—I could turn the piggy upside down and shake out enough small change to satisfy my desires. All the while, my granny had been trying to tell me I was a millionaire. Living in a piggy world, what can we understand of the realms of Rockefellers and Mellons and Du Ponts? Who would suspect that he or she has a Fort Knox within, when most of us feel lucky just to be able to pay our bills? That's why I say that everyone is ordinary until he or she begins to tap these resources; yet everyone is extraordinary when these resources are realized.

As long as we live on the surface level of life, our difficulties will be superficial also. If they seem big, it is because we have so little of our deeper resources at our command. But as we learn to function at a deeper level, the demands naturally become more challenging. I can assure you from my own long years of sadhana that these demands will never become more than you can handle or more oppressive than you can bear.

To believe we are unequal to the challenges of spiritual growth is wrong shraddha, piggy-bank shraddha, the result of a lower image of ourselves. I want to correct that shraddha by pointing out that these challenges are natural and necessary as meditation deepens, and everyone has the resources to deal with them.

Assurance based on experience

In my own sadhana, when I found myself plunging into deeper consciousness at a speed I was not prepared for, I made a very heartening discovery: however difficult the problems I faced, I could always turn inwards, go deeper, and bring up a little more capacity for solving them. This discovery comes to everyone who perseveres, and once it comes, the wrong shraddha of defeatism and diffidence begins to be set right.

In other words, whether or not we feel personally worthy or personally capable of superhuman effort is not the issue in sadhana. The great mystics of East and West have given us their assurance, based on experience, that no one achieves Self-realization through personal effort; it is always a supreme gift of grace. All we can do is give our very best continually: follow every discipline to the best of our ability, pick ourselves up when we slip, and strive continuously to unify our desires. I tell my friends, “If you strive as I have striven, you will overcome all obstacles. That is Sri Krishna’s promise.”

Yet there is another side to this verse too, a second half, which I do not want to dwell on but which is vitally necessary to understand: this wholehearted personal effort is absolutely essential. It is not sufficient, but it is essential. Unless we throw all our personal weight on the side of sadhana, that weight is going to fall on the side of self-will: and as Sri Krishna says here, “If you will not try your best, there is no way I can help you.” This is not a matter of the Lord withholding his love and support; these can never be withdrawn. It is simply a matter of spiritual dynamics.

All of us begin sadhana with doubts and reservations

I want to be very clear here, because to me these are very reassuring verses. All of us begin sadhana with doubts and reservations; if we did not have doubts and reservations, we would not be here as human beings. Some of these are relatively superficial and fall away as our meditation deepens. But others, whose roots go terribly deep in personality, may actually appear more acute when we reach a level of awareness where we see them more clearly.

It is easy to get despondent at this point, to throw up our hands and say, “What can I do? The Gita says I need wholehearted devotion to go further, and I’m split in two.” This is only natural. After all, we are trying to do away with the ego; we can’t expect it to go quietly. It pulls in one direction; the Self pulls in another. Throw the weight of your personal choices and desires on the side of the Self, the Lord entreats; he will do the rest. “If we will do what we can,” says Augustine, “He can do as he wills.”

Humility but great daring

The unconscious is a vast undiscovered land, trackless, endless. On the face of it, bringing light to these limitless regions is impossible; the very word “unconscious” tells us that this part of the mind is not subject to conscious regulation. Yet the mystics say with humility but great daring, “Yes, it is impossible. Nevertheless, we have done it; therefore we know that it can be done.” Compared to this stupendous mastery, I don’t think any earthly achievement can be mentioned in the same breath. 🌸

O My God, Trinity Whom I Adore

Elizabeth of the Trinity

O my God,
Trinity whom I adore,
help me to forget myself entirely
that I may be established in You
as still and as peaceful
as if my soul were already in eternity.
May nothing trouble my peace
or make me leave You,
O my Unchanging One,
but may each minute
carry me further
into the depths of Your Mystery.
Give peace to my soul;
make it Your heaven,
Your beloved dwelling
and Your resting place.
May I never leave You there alone
but be wholly present,
my faith wholly vigilant,
wholly adoring,
and wholly surrendered
to Your creative Action.

Community Stories

An Open-Eyed Faith

Two things drew me to Easwaran's teaching and have sustained me through challenging times.

First is the magnificently ecumenical way in which Easwaran has drawn together the spiritual teachings and mystical practices of the world's great traditions and made them accessible to practice through the eight points.

Second has been how he asks us to pursue, and to be gifted by, faith—not as blind trust in facts and beliefs that may or may not be true, but as an experiential faith that grows and is challenged by our own lived experience.

Together, these have helped me to sustain practice when my own shraddha and the shraddha of others have seemed more driven by epochs of egoistic evolutionary conditioning than by the wobbling developmental progress toward unity.

Underneath the evil that has been done in the name of religion, underneath my own shortcomings and backsliding, my faith, hope, and love are bolstered by the tiny but unmistakable progress I see developing through the practice of the eight points.

Despite the backward pull of conditioning, a faith based on personal experience sustains my practice and gives me hope and glimpses of the progress toward unity that Gandhi experienced:

For I can see that in the midst of death life persists,
in the midst of untruth truth persists,
in the midst of darkness light persists. Hence I gather that
God is Life, Truth, Light. He is Love. He is the Supreme Good.

— A passage meditator

The Email

"Nancy's comment to you in that email was pretty rude, don't you think?"

When my colleague said this (with an irritated look on her face), I knew exactly what she meant. Earlier that day, a co-worker sent a "reply all" email with a condescending remark aimed at the way I'd handled a project. "Yeah," I said with a shrug, "It's not the first time."

Honestly, when I read the email, I'd chalked it up to the sender's generally prickly personality and didn't think much of it. However, once a colleague brought it up, my mind began to speed up.

A big part of my personal identity has always been that I work hard and do well at my job and even my so-called leisure activities. As a young person in my teens and 20s, I would often lash back sharply or pout when challenged or criticized. Looking back, this was probably a smoke screen for shame at not being perceived as perfect. I didn't have much sense of how my reaction affected others; I wasn't even sure how to regulate myself.

As I journeyed through my 30s and into my 40s, intellectual training, career experience, and a budding meditation practice shifted my tendencies. Instead of emotional reactions washing me away, I was often able to reason my way through a situation where my competency was challenged. I felt a stronger sense of agency, and believed I was responsible for doing my part to speak and act in a way that demonstrated my skill (and perceived superiority if I'm honest). I'd used disciplines to build my ability to regulate, though connection and authenticity were often faint.

Along the way, I continued to meditate on passages, also reading and watching Easwaran. More and more, I noticed things like these criteria for when we should speak: “Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?” Easwaran was teaching me that patience (with myself and others) is an expression of love. My shraddha, what I believed, was evolving over time, based on my deepest desires.

So now, with almost 30 years of professional experience and nearly 20 years with passage meditation, how would I respond to Nancy’s comment?

I confess that initially I felt embarrassed that my colleague mentioned it and disappointed that Nancy chose to write her comment publicly. I questioned whether I had handled the situation poorly and became indignant when I decided I’d handled it just fine. My mind even began composing emails, and the distraction intruded on my evening meditation. I thought I could write a carefully constructed reply to provide feedback, letting her know her barbed comment was out of line, yet doing so in a way that kept me on moral high ground. The urge to *do something about it* was still with me when I woke up in the morning. When I got to work, I opened my laptop and hit “reply all,” ready to take action.

That’s when the insight came: I was entangled. I closed my laptop and went for a short walk outside, just around the block of my office building, repeating my mantram. I decided the better route—the one that matched my deep desire for unity—was to let go of the need to address her remark. It dawned on me that I could model kindness and patience, sending Nancy compassion that would be far more effective than giving tit for tat.



Ramagiri Ashram

I returned to my desk and wrote a brief email, simply moving the work forward, devoid of any acknowledgement of the barb. As soon as I clicked send, I felt a sense of peace and security. I looked at the picture of Easwaran on my desk and said a soft, "Thank you," full of gratitude for the grace and guidance allowing me to move closer to awareness of unity through everyday experience.

— A passage meditator

Shifting Shraddha

I once overheard my boss at work describing me, “He has a tremendous capacity for work.”

I recall thinking, “He’s right.”

Never the most talented or eminent, often feeling behind in aptitude or status, I had learned to compensate by working longer and harder. In sports I pushed myself in physical conditioning and ran down every last ball in competition. In school I stayed up late studying and took extra courses. At work I told myself that most of the benefit comes not from giving 100%, but from giving an extra 20% on top of that.

Working hard was my shraddha.

And it paid off.

I was successful by most of the common measures.

Fortunately, I had chosen a helping profession, so most of my successes resulted in useful service to others. But too much was driven by ego.

I had a vague notion that something was missing, and in that searching, someone gave me a copy of Easwaran’s books on meditation and the mantram. I devoured them and started immediately. And they helped—in a way. The mantram dampened my mental churning, and accompanied by one-pointed attention and training the senses, it seemed to give me even more energy to pour into my work. I took up a second meditation, right before bedtime, that helped me to calm down after an over-stuffed day.

Then I hit a wall. I could not be any more “efficient” in cramming useful activities into my day. The things I’d committed

to were like a ballooning loan payment coming due just as the collateral assets are dried up.

I stepped back. I turned most of those commitments over to others whom fortunately I'd been grooming to expand our collaborative endeavors. I turned down a prestigious new job offer, which in a way would have been the reward for all the hard work, but in another way was a karmic comeuppance.

Somehow my practice became reframed. My shraddha was shifting. I discovered the joyful symbiosis of being slowed down and one-pointed. In that space, it was easy to focus more on *how* I worked than on the outcome, and that let me work more harmoniously while focusing on what was most important—selfless service—even if it might not have an ego-gratifying outcome.

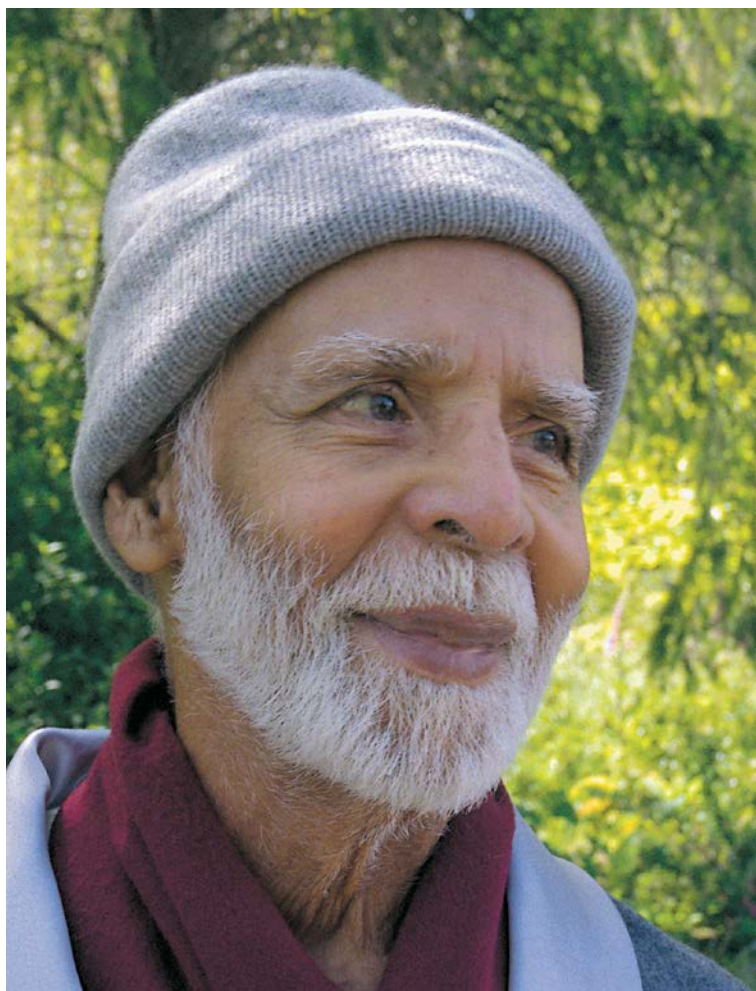
I changed my evening meditation from a day's end relaxation technique into a before dinner practice that picked up the thread of morning meditation and a more slowed down day, and focused the evening on others.

When the Spring 2019 *Blue Mountain Journal* arrived, "The Purpose of Work," I felt like it was speaking directly to me.

My shraddha shift still is in process, and I'm vigilant about using the eight points to transform the energy of my overwork samskara into selfless service. But now, rather than my practice being a crutch for my samskara, my work is foodstuff for my practice.

— A passage meditator

See past issues of this journal at www.bmcm.org/journal.



Easwaran, 1990s

Faithfulness

Eknath Easwaran, from *Love Never Fails*

One summer many years ago a friend took me on an excursion to Yosemite National Forest, which must be one of the most spectacular in this country. But by the time evening fell there were so many radios going, in campers and out around campfires, that I wondered to myself, “Why did we have to come so far just to hear the same old noise?” Only when the radio-listeners fell asleep and the radios were silenced did I hear the music of a tiny stream, babbling along only a few yards from our campsite.

It had been running on all that time, but in the midst of the hubbub I hadn’t even known it existed. Its song was so glorious at that moment that it seemed to me almost as if the stream were singing, “I may come and I may go, but the Lord goes on forever.”

On the strength of my own experience in meditation, I can assure you that a divine stream of wisdom is flowing in your heart always. When the mind is quietened, you can hear it running blissfully through the very depths of consciousness. As you listen to this song carefully, with complete concentration, from somewhere comes a soft whisper of unshakable certitude: “You are not a finite creature, a separate fragment that one day will pass away. You are infinite and whole, and you will never die.” I don’t think any greater assurance can come to a human being.

Augustine describes marvelously his own step-by-step descent to this seabed of consciousness:

Thus by stages I passed from bodies to the soul which uses the body for its perceiving, and from this to the soul's inner power, to which the body's senses present external things; and from there I passed on to the reasoning power, to which is referred for judgment what is received from the body's senses. This too realized that it was mutable in me, and rose to its own understanding. It withdrew my thought from its habitual way, abstracting from the confused crowds of phantasms that it might find what light suffused it, when with utter certainty it cried aloud that the immutable was to be preferred to the mutable, and how it had come to know the immutable itself. Thus in the thrust of a trembling glance my mind arrived at That Which Is. Then indeed I saw clearly thy invisible things which are understood by the things that are made.

Hear the music of the Lord

At this level of awareness the external world is far, far away. You have traveled to an enormous depth, and you know with certainty that this world to which you have descended is much more real, and what you understand at this depth much more valid, than what you see on the surface. On the surface, for example, we feel that it is natural for people to quarrel, for nations to go to war. "It's only human," we say. Now we realize in the depths of our soul that quarreling and fighting are not natural at all. What is natural is loving everybody, seeing everybody as one.

After this experience, even if another person is offensive or uncooperative, we will easily be able to hear the music of the

Lord above the discordant notes of the ego. This is one very practical way in which this supreme discovery can help us in our day-to-day work and relationships. Awareness of this unnamed voice gives you faith in people, and that faith enables them to see themselves in a much more positive light: as a spark of divinity, with undiscovered resources of love, wisdom, and security.

The joy that accompanies this realization of unity is so tremendous that if it were to come upon us suddenly, the nervous system would not be able to bear it. Fortunately it takes many, many years for ordinary people like you and me to reach this state. Even some of the greatest of mystical figures have been physically immobilized for days and nights by the impact of this joy. John of the Cross gives us a taste of its intensity by likening it to the rapture of a tryst between two lovers. Here are the concluding stanzas of his poem “On a Dark Night,” which distills in lyric language the course of meditation:

In a dark night,
flamed with love's impatient longing—
Oh what good fortune!—
I went out unseen,
My house being now all silent;
...
I lost and forgot myself,
My face resting on my Beloved;

All things ceased, and I surrendered myself,
Leaving my cares
Forgotten among the lilies.

The magnetic pull of love

It takes many years for us to build up our nervous system, our emotional endurance, so that we can receive the impact of these waves of pure joy and still carry on our daily responsibilities. For the world can ill afford to be deprived of the precious contribution such a person can make.

This is the underlying purpose of the various disciplines I have been describing to you: first to make this divine experience possible, and then to allow us to function beautifully in everyday life once this experience has been attained.

This stream of joy is flowing forever in your consciousness and mine. If anybody asks, “Then why don’t I hear it myself?” Augustine gives the answer: the noise of our physical urges and the agitation of the mind is drowning it out. “Be still,” the Bible says, “and know that I am God.” Augustine, when he finally discovered this joy lying hidden within him, exclaimed,

Late have I loved thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved thee! For behold, thou wert within me and I outside; and I sought thee outside and in my unloveliness fell upon these lovely things that thou hast made. Thou wert with me and I was not with thee. I was kept from thee by those things, yet had they not been in thee, they would not have been at all. Thou didst call and cry to me and break open my deafness; and thou didst send forth thy beams and shine upon me and chase away my blindness; thou didst breathe fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and do now pant for thee. I tasted thee, and now hunger and thirst for thee; thou didst touch me, and now I burn for thy peace.



Easwaran, 1990s

Augustine is expressing one of the most joyful realizations we can make on the spiritual journey: it is the Lord alone who all along has been subtly drawing our attention ever deeper within. Sometimes he uses the magnetic pull of love, which is naturally the way we prefer to be drawn toward perfection. But sometimes, when we do not respond, he must resort to the corrective pressure of pain and sorrow.

In the end, however we are led, none of us will be able to resist the overwhelming power of the Lord: his wisdom, his love, his joy, his peace. But through meditation and its allied disciplines, by “straining beyond ourselves,” each of us can make this epic journey infinitely shorter and sweeter.

From the mouths of mystics

And imagine if that moment were to go on and on, leaving behind all other sights and sounds but this one vision which ravishes and absorbs and fixes the beholder in joy, so that the rest of eternal life were like that moment of illumination which leaves us breathless . . .

Now we are going to hear, from the mouths of mystics who have experienced it for themselves, just what effects the realization of God wrought on their daily lives. Buried in their accounts somewhere must be hidden the key to the mysterious transformation of their lives—the key that enabled them, according to their own times and temperaments, to bring the joy, the wisdom, and the absorbing peace of that eternal inner realm to bear in this fragmented world. These precious accounts must hold many clues that we, in our round of mundane activities, can apply in our efforts to make our lives a gift to those around us.

Augustine emphasizes that the cacophony of physical and mental urges has to be quieted before we can hear the eternal stream within us. Saint Teresa of Avila, who wrote openly and in detail of her interior experiences, calls this the Prayer of Quiet. “This true Prayer of Quiet has in it an element of the supernatural.” Those who experience it, she means, are no longer ordinary. In some sense they have become extraordinary, in that they have connected their body, their mind, and—most important—their will to the divine will within.

She goes on:

We cannot, in spite of all our efforts, procure it for ourselves. It is a sort of peace in which the soul establishes herself, or rather in which God establishes the soul. All her powers are at rest. She understands, but otherwise than by the senses, that she is already near her God, and if she draws a little nearer, she will become by union one with him. One feels a great bodily comfort, a great satisfaction of the soul. Such is the happiness of the soul in seeing herself close to the spring, that even without drinking of the waters she finds herself refreshed.

Here we encounter a subtle attitude that seems to set the mystics apart. “We cannot, in spite of all our efforts, procure this for ourselves; it is a sort of peace . . . in which God establishes the soul.” Augustine voices the same attitude: “Far be it from me, O Lord, to think that I am happy for any or every joy that I may have. For there is a joy which is not given to the ungodly but only to those who love thee for thy own sake, whose joy is thyself.” This joy is a gift—and there is no other way to come by it.

Teresa concludes her description with these ecstatic lines:

It seems to [the soul] that she wants nothing more. Indeed, to those who are in this state it seems that at the least movement [of the mind], they will lose this sweet peace. They are in the palace close to their King, and they see that he is beginning to give them his kingdom. It seems to them that they are no longer in this world.

They find themselves in the realm of love, they say wonderingly:

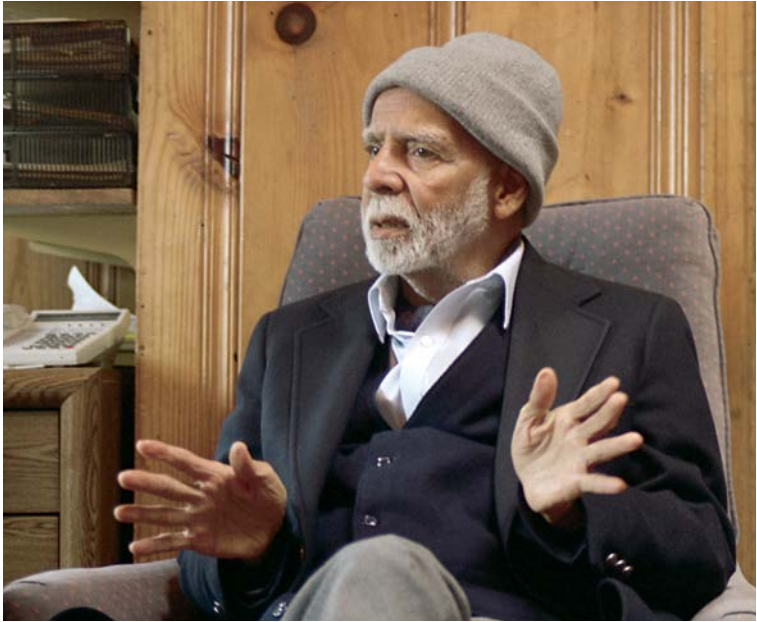
the realm of reality. Their bodies continue to function in this phenomenal world of ours, but their center no longer lies in a world subject to change and decay, to sorrow and suffering. It is, as Augustine so graphically puts it, fixed in permanent joy.

Yet a great dilemma still presents itself: how are we to cultivate this attitude of theirs until God himself is pleased to grant us the experience they describe? “It seems that at the least movement” of the mind, Teresa says, “they will lose this sweet peace.” This is a formidable clue.

In the depths of our consciousness

When you dive into the deeper realms of consciousness you realize what a noisy factory the mind is, churning out thoughts day in and day out. Most of us are unaware how abrasive this activity is; we have never tasted the healing silence of the world within. Like those who live in the flight paths of a big international airport, we say, “What noise?” We simply don’t hear. When I read about people who enjoy scenes of cruelty in movies, for instance, what I hear them saying is that nothing registers of the turmoil in the mind. They have turned their sensitivity to OFF.

Go to a wilderness area, where the sounds of civilization do not reach, and you will understand how great is the contrast between the surface level of awareness and these deeper realms. The silence seems magnified by comparison—and, by the same token, much more eloquent. I suspect this is one of the strongest reasons why city-dwellers take every opportunity to “get away from it all.” They relish the chance to escape the noise around them, and to quiet a little the din inside.



Easwaran, 1990s

Ultimately, however, there is only one place where you and I can find rest: in the depths of our consciousness. Everywhere else we wander is not our true home. I can tell you truthfully that within reason, I have tasted every legitimate satisfaction life has to offer. That is why I would have no hesitation in standing on any platform in the world and saying, “There is no comparison between the joy I find in the depths of my heart and everything I knew before.”

Teresa describes in unforgettable words the consolation this experience brings:

Rapture is a great help to recognize our true home and to see that we are pilgrims in this life. It is a great thing to see

what is going on in our home, and to know where we are someday going to live. For if a person has to go and settle in another country, it is a great help to him in undergoing the fatigues of his journey that he has discovered it to be a country where he may live still, in the most perfect peace.

Augustine addresses his Lord in strikingly similar terms:

Nor in all these things that my mind traverses in search of you, do I find any sure place for my mind save in you: in whom all that is scattered in me is brought into one, so that nothing of me may depart from you. And sometimes you admit me to a state of mind that I am not ordinarily in, a kind of delight which could it ever be made permanent in me, would be hard to distinguish from the life to come.

Years of arduous endeavor

Yet the hard fact is that this is but a flash of delight, as he says, a brief moment of wisdom and utter peace. It cannot be sustained for long. It fades. “So I returned to my old habits,” Augustine says, “bearing nothing with me but a memory of delight and a desire, as if for something of which I had caught the fragrance but which I had not yet the strength to eat.”

Even after you have this ineffable experience, it seems, years of arduous endeavor still lie ahead before your glimpse of the divine can be made permanent. In the depths of meditation you may experience the Prayer of Quiet for a few moments—the space of an *Ave Maria*, as Teresa puts it. But the state to be aimed at, in which that moment of joy goes “on and on,” is having this supreme stillness in your heart with your eyes wide

open and your senses alert, in the midst of the hurly-burly of daily existence.

Meister Eckhart has a picturesque yet comprehensive way of describing how this miracle of miracles was worked in him: “I was made all of one piece by you, my most sweet God.” Wherever you cut the God-conscious person, he says, you will find him the same. Working or playing, with people or alone, awake or asleep, he will be aware of the unity underlying life. This is the real meaning of that elusive phrase “carrying out the will of God.” It means, in effect, that you live in joy always.

True faithfulness

Peace of mind, in other words, is not an end in itself. It is a means, a phase in one’s spiritual growth, and there is much more growth yet to come. The Prayer of Quiet is a great bridge leading from an uncoordinated life of self-centered activity to a new, unified life of selfless action. With it we leave behind our old world, our old habits of mind, in order to go on to greater, wider worlds of loving work.

The secret to be gleaned from these accounts is delineated by Augustine himself in a marvelously practical prayer:

Thou dost command faithfulness. And when I knew, as it is said, that no one could be faithful unless God gave it, even this was a point of wisdom: to know whose gift it was. For by faithfulness we are collected and bound up into unity within ourself, whereas we had been scattered abroad in multiplicity. Too little does any man love thee, who loves some other thing together with thee; loving it not on account of thee, O thou Love, who art ever burning

and never extinguished! O Charity, my God, enkindle me!
Thou dost command faithfulness: grant what thou dost
command and then command what thou wilt.

This last is the famous sentence which so startled the ecclesiastics of Augustine's time. What he is saying is revolutionary: that true faithfulness to the will of God can only arise out of some personal experience—in the form of a gift—of its unrivaled power, which can come only when we have reduced our self-will almost to zero.

Everything we do matters

This kind of assertion is common from mystics. It sets them apart. Yet understandably enough, it gives rise to grave misgivings among those who would like to arrive at this faith but have not had the personal experience that validates it. “Can we not have true faith,” they wonder, “unless it is given to us? What then is the point of all this effort and self-sacrifice which is put before us as the way to reach God?”

My answer would be simple: every ounce of effort makes it that much easier for the experience to be given to us. Everything we do matters. Meditating matters very much; so does remembering to repeat the Holy Name. Working hard and selflessly, eating nutritious food in moderate quantities, getting enough exercise, staying calm and kind through the problems of the day: all these matter a good deal. They are, in fact, our real job in life; our other activities are secondary.

On questionnaires we are often asked who our employer is. Each of us is really Self-employed: employed by our innermost Self, the Lord. When we waste time in idle pursuits, when we



Easwaran, 1990s

quarrel, the Lord tries to remind us that we are doing all this on company time: time that belongs to everybody. Isn't your pay docked when you do personal things on company time? The same thing happens in life, though we do not usually make the connection. When we do selfish things, we lose some of our vigor, some of our peace of mind. That is the Lord, trying to alert us that we are wasting precious time.

Those most fortunate few who have had direct experience of the unity underlying seemingly separate phenomena immediately make the connection between their thoughts, their actions, and their peace of mind. When Teresa had to justify her course of action to her Church superiors, she didn't say that a careful survey of previous and analogous situations had produced such and such a recommendation, or that UPS delivered a twenty-page computer printout specifying what she was to do.

She would say in complete faith, "His Majesty came himself

and told me what to do.” This is what becoming established in God means: the welfare of the whole speaks to you, direct and urgent. And the tone of the message is not, “The boss phoned a half hour ago; kindly call him back at your leisure.” The Lord says, “Teresa, I am talking to *you*. Give me your complete attention.”

There is a certitude about that voice, a certitude which can baffle a person who is not used to hearing it. Augustine describes this clearly and dramatically:

And thou didst cry to me from afar: “I am who am.” And I heard thee, as one hears in the heart. And there was from that moment no ground of doubt in me: I would more easily have doubted my own life than have doubted that truth is.

What the Lord tells you is simple. To Francis of Assisi it was “Rebuild my church”; to Augustine, a line from Paul. The actual words are not particularly important; the message is clear and universal: “Live for all. Their joy is your joy.” After such an experience it does not matter who tells you, “You didn’t hear any such thing. This is not true!” As Pascal says, this truth carries its own validity. It is self-evident.

A lifelong vacation

There is no way of describing the effect of these experiences except by referring to one’s own life. I do not ascribe much importance to visions and voices; I look at how a person actually lives. If your experience of unity is genuine, you cannot possibly live for yourself alone, because that is the sum and

substance of this call: “Live for all. Work for all.” And if you say, “What about a vacation once in a while?” the Lord will be blunt: “I’m giving you a lifelong vacation! That ego of yours, which has always been telling you to stand up for your pleasures and fight for your rights, has been put out of his misery. Now, at long last, you can have a real vacation.”

When most of your mental hullabaloo has been quietened, you respond easily and immediately to the sanctity of life. Wherever you see it violated, from a very deep level something in you springs into action. The other morning, after a brisk walk on the beach, I had returned to the car and was scraping the sand off my shoes when out of the corner of my eye I saw a cat leap off a sandbank onto a tiny bird. My response was so fast that I nearly succeeded in grabbing that bird out of the cat’s mouth before it realized I was there. I didn’t blame the cat; that is its nature. Yet I had to try to save that bird: that, after all, is my nature.

Once you have personal experience of the unity of life, your joy will lie in relieving distress wherever you find it. This requires detachment and enormous faith in human goodness. Only the person who has practiced spiritual disciplines regularly can face sorrow over and over with unflagging faith in the divine core of human nature. Yet when attention is unified, you can see straight into the heart of a person; whatever he does, whatever she suffers, you know that core of divinity remains intact. 🌸



Ramagiri Ashram



Ramagiri Ashram

How faith takes root in our heart and grows

Ekknath Easwaran, from *Seeing with the Eyes of Love*

In playful language we can never forget, Sri Ramakrishna, the great Bengali saint of the nineteenth century, says that in the first half of our spiritual endeavors, we are like baby monkeys. The little monkey holds on to its mother while she jumps from branch to branch, and he has to hold tight because if he loosens his grip, down he'll fall.

But during the second half, Ramakrishna says, we are like kittens. The mother cat doesn't expect her kitten to hold on to her; she picks him up by the scruff of the neck. You would think she is being cruel to hold him like that; but in fact she is being very protective. The kitten just goes limp and lets the mother cat do the traveling.

And when the kitten is set down on his feet again, the mother's protective love continues to surround him. He can be right on the verge of making what the feline world sees as a serious mistake, but the mother won't let him. Have you seen a mother cat reach out and slap the kitten with her paw? It hurts, and the kitten doesn't make that mistake again!

This is how faith takes root in our heart and grows. Sometimes people speak of faith as something we should cultivate on principle—no matter how the intellect balks, no matter what our own experience has taught us. My own attitude is stubbornly practical. I've never taken anything on faith that I could not test against my own experience.

A living faith

Today, I would say freely that I am a man of profound faith in God. But mine is a living faith. It began as the most tentative proposition: “I shall move in this direction, even when it doesn’t look pleasant, and let us see what happens.” As my meditation deepened, great difficulties did come my way, but over and over I have been rescued—sometimes at the eleventh hour. I could never have told you why, but my path would be cleared; courage, insight, and resourcefulness would come to me.

Today, after many years of validation in my personal experience, I can claim that my faith in God has become unshakable. But that faith is the fruit of a long period of effort and clear observation—and, I would add, an open mind.

The poet Robert Browning uses a geometrical simile: all the Lord expects us to do is to draw the arc; the Lord himself will complete the circle. Have I done everything possible to train my senses, to subdue my passions, to liquidate my self-will? If I have, even if I have not been completely successful, he will augment my strivings and reward my efforts a hundredfold. 🌸

The Way of Love

From Easwaran's translation of the Bhagavad Gita

For those who set their hearts on me
And worship me with unfailing devotion and faith,
The way of love leads sure and swift to me.

Those who seek the transcendental Reality,
Unmanifested, without name or form,
Beyond the reach of feeling and of thought,
With their senses subdued and mind serene
And striving for the good of all beings,
They too will verily come unto me.

Yet hazardous
And slow is the path to the Unrevealed,
Difficult for physical man to tread.
But they for whom I am the goal supreme,
Who do all work renouncing self for me
And meditate on me with single-hearted
Devotion, these will I swiftly rescue
From the fragment's cycle of birth and death
To fullness of eternal life in me.

Still your mind in me, still yourself in me,
And without doubt you shall be united with me,

Lord of Love, dwelling in your heart.
But if you cannot still your mind in me,
Learn to do so through the practice of meditation.
If you lack the will for such self-discipline,
Engage yourself in selfless service of all around you,
For selfless service can lead you at last to me.
If you are unable to do even this,
Surrender yourself to me in love,
Receiving success and failure with equal calmness
As granted by me.

Better indeed is knowledge than mechanical practice.
Better than knowledge is meditation.
But better still is surrender in love,
Because there follows immediate peace.

That one I love who is incapable of ill will,
And returns love for hatred.
Living beyond the reach of *I* and *mine*
And of pleasure and pain, full of mercy,
Contented, self-controlled, firm in faith,
With all their heart and all their mind given to me—
With such as these I am in love.

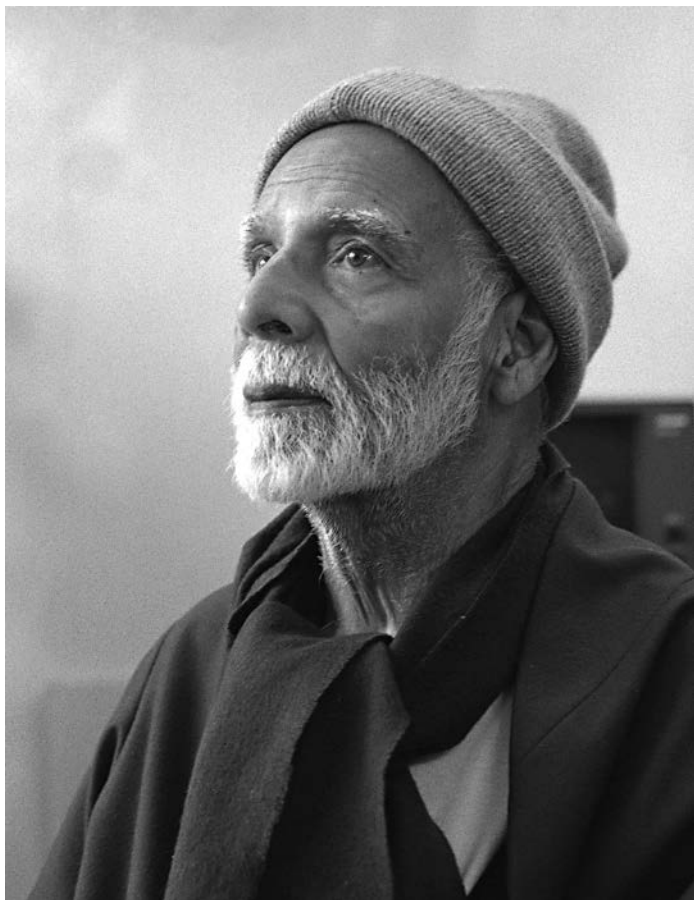
Faith in the Self Within Us

Ekknath Easwaran, from *Words to Live By*

Sometimes in our spiritual life, we will find we have come to a point where our progress seems to be stopped cold. Sometimes these dry periods are just that, a boring stretch of ground that we must get over by walking step by step. But sometimes we find before us a chasm, and at that time no amount of plodding at our usual humble pace will get us across.

At those times, devotion to a divine ideal—whether as a personal incarnation of God, or simply complete faith in the Self within us—can enable us to make a leap.

We will close our eyes and say, “I do not have the capacity to go farther without help. Now it is up to You.” We’ll go forward, secure in the faith that the Self, the Lord within, will never let us fall but will carry us safely to the other side. 🌸



Eknath Easwaran, 1990s

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/

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

BMCM Satsang Live Our twice-weekly online satsang, open to everyone. Find more at www.bmcm.org/community/bmcm-satsang-live/.

BMCM eSatsang Our weekly write-in study of Easwaran's books and journals for dedicated passage meditators. See www.bmcm.org/community/esatsang.

Online Retreats, Webinars, and Workshops for 2025

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.

Setu (Senior) Retreats:

January 17–21, September 12–16

Introductory Webinars:

January 25, May 10, August 16

Weeklong Retreats:

February 21–25, October 17–21

Returnee Workshops:

March 8, May 31, October 4

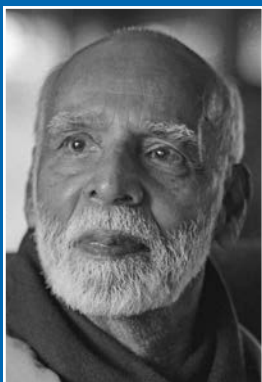
Introductory Weekend Retreats:

March 14–16, June 20–22, September 26–28

Returnee Weekend Retreats:

April 11–13, November 7–9

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!



Once you have personal experience of the unity of life, your joy will lie in relieving distress wherever you find it. This requires detachment and enormous faith in human goodness.

Only the person who has practiced spiritual disciplines regularly can face sorrow over and over with unflagging faith in the divine core of human nature.

Yet when attention is unified, you can see straight into the heart of a person; whatever he does, whatever she suffers, you know that core of divinity remains intact.

— Eknath Easwaran

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