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# Blue Mountain

ESTABLISHED IN 1990 BY EKNATH EASWARAN  
FOR PRESENTING HIS EIGHT POINT PROGRAM

## Stormy Seas

by Eknath Easwaran

**M**Y FIRST encounter with an ocean storm came on my passage from India to the U.S. on the Fulbright exchange program. I sailed from Bombay on an ancient P&O liner that had been in service before the First World War. There were no luxuries, but I enjoyed the trip because of the variety of passengers – from empire builders to scholars from the Far East – and the ever-changing beauty of the sea.

But July in the Arabian Sea is monsoon season, and three or four days out our little ship began to be tossed like a toy by winds and rain.

A storm is a great equalizer. All distinctions of class and color were swept away. Empire builders hung at the railings side by side with Asian academics, clutching identical brown bags. All of us cheered with relief when the weather passed and we were obliged to put in at Aden for repairs.

Sailing from Cherbourg to New York on H.M.S. *Queen Mary* was an utterly different experience. The *Queen Mary* too was nearing retirement age. But she was fast, and positively luxurious by compari-

son with that P&O vessel. When we hit rough seas on the Atlantic, we sailed through majestically without a roll.

“Why aren’t we being tossed about?” I asked an officer. “Is it because of the ship’s size?”

“No,” he said proudly, “it’s the stabilizers. We installed them a couple of years ago. Now rough waters don’t bother her at all.”

I often recall those two journeys to illustrate one of the most important truths I have ever learned. Like a storm, life is a great equalizer. It does bring sunny days, but it is sure to bring storms as well. And regardless of class, color, status, birth, or wealth, some of us sail

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*Below, from our archives: Eknath Easwaran, 1996*

EKNATH

EASWARAN

*has been called one of the foremost teachers of meditation in our times. From his arrival in the United States in 1959 on the Fulbright exchange program until his passing in the fall of 1999, he taught to modern men and women his Eight Point Program, based on his unique method of meditation on memorized inspirational passages from the world’s great religions. Many thousands of people representing the full range of cultural and religious backgrounds attest to the benefits of his teaching. He continues to teach through his twenty-six books on spiritual living – over a million copies in print in twenty-six languages – and through the ongoing programs and publications of the organization he founded in 1961 to carry on his work: the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation and its publishing arm, Nilgiri Press.*

Eknath Easwaran’s commentaries for *Blue Mountain* are drawn from the thousands of previously unpublished talks and writings in the Blue Mountain Center archives – part of an ongoing effort to make his teaching freely available around the world.



## BLUE MOUNTAIN

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## 1 Stormy Seas



Storm and stress are part of life, but Easwaran assures us that everyone can learn to weather them with courage, confidence, and compassion.

## 7 Answering a Call for Help



Dorian Dugger found her spiritual practice indispensable after an unexpected tragedy in the family.

## 8 Calm in a Storm of Criticism

Two meditators discover that receiving negative comments can be turned into a positive experience.

## 9 The Gift of Forgiveness



After years of tension, Elise Sullivan takes a bold step towards an estranged relative – and greater peace of mind.

## 9 Let Nothing Upset You

They used to bother her, but Valerie Fontaine has found a way to face MRIs and root canals without dread.

## 10 Setting Our Course



How do Tracey and Max Godsil keep their meditation practice strong with two-year-old triplets?

## Blue Mountain Center of Meditation

The Center offers instruction and guidance in meditation and allied living skills, following the Eight Point Program developed by Sri Eknath Easwaran. The approach is nondenominational, nonsectarian, and free from dogma and ritual. It can be used within each person's own cultural and religious background to relieve stress, heal relationships, release deeper resources, and realize one's highest potential.

## The Eight Point Program

1. **MEDITATION** Silent repetition in the mind of memorized inspirational passages from the world's great religions. Practiced for one-half hour each morning.
2. **THE 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 COMPANIONSHIP** Spending time regularly with others following the Eight Point Program for mutual inspiration and support.
8. **READING THE MYSTICS** Drawing inspiration from writings by and about the world's great spiritual figures and from the scriptures of all religions.

## Sri Eknath Easwaran

Schooled in both Eastern and Western traditions, Eknath Easwaran took to the spiritual life amidst a successful career in India as a professor of English literature, a writer, and a lecturer. He came to the University of California, Berkeley, in 1960 on the Fulbright exchange program and established the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation in Northern California in 1961. His 1968 Berkeley class is believed to be the first accredited course in meditation at any Western university. His deep personal experience and his love for his students have made the ancient art of meditation accessible to those who hold jobs and live active lives among friends and family.

A note about Sri Easwaran's name: *Sri* is a traditional Indian honorific, *Eknath* is his family name, and *Easwaran* is the name given to him by his spiritual teacher, his mother's mother.

# Light Persists



Christine Easwaran

**G**REAT TRAGEDIES demand our attention, whether they are global or personal. We begin to ask serious questions about life. Why are we here? Is there a purpose? What should I do now? What happens after death?

Mahatma Gandhi addressed these questions in a radio broadcast from London shortly before World War II when he said, "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."

What does this mean in practical terms? Sri Easwaran explains, "We have to remember our mortality all the time – remember that every day we are closer to the great change that will come to all of us."

"How short life is! Too short not to love, too short not to care. This has a direct bearing on daily life. People who are selfish forget their mortality. People who

remember their mortality – and the mortality of all those around them – have no time to be unkind, no time to be selfish."

Isn't he telling us that there is a deep unity – an interconnectedness – in all life that stirs our consciousness at times of crisis? These occasions offer windows of opportunity for us as individuals to help civilization move forward. But first we need to accept our own capacity as human beings to make a difference by directing our

thoughts in loving, positive directions. As Sri Easwaran often encouraged us, we have the power to change the world around us by transforming negative thoughts to positive ones. He

told us that we become what we meditate on, and taught Passage Meditation – a method of focusing on the words of passages from the world's great scriptures and mystics – as a

way to change our lives and influence those around us.

Recently I read a statement ascribed to a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Turiyananda: "Try to think that you are already that which you aspire to become. At first one has to imagine it, and then comes the real experience."

In that spirit, inspired by a favorite passage from Saint Augustine, we offer the short prayer printed here, which anyone can use.

Easwaran taught us that a selfless man or woman, though perhaps seeming to go through the day doing nothing extraordinary, is continually revitalizing the atmosphere in which we think. By being vigilant and not encouraging negative thoughts, all of us can offer this vital service – which benefits everybody, including ourselves.

Of course, thinking peaceful thoughts is not enough. We need to practice bringing peace into our own lives – particularly during challenging times – so that we can gradually become what Saint Francis called instruments of peace. That is the theme of this issue.

*Christine Easwaran*

Christine Easwaran  
Board of Trustees

## A Short Prayer

*Imagine a green earth, clean water and air, and abundant food for all creatures.*

*Imagine a global family holding hands around the world.*

*Imagine your community, your family, yourself, radiating love and good will toward all life.*

*Isn't this what is meant in the scriptures, "Enter thou into perfect joy?"*



Continued from page 1 through surely and some flounder and even go under.

Few human beings are born with the ability to weather storm and stress with grace. But everyone can learn. We can't control the weather outside, but we can control how we respond. Like the *Queen Mary*, we can install stabilizers where we need them – not outside ourselves, of course, but in the mind.

For it is in the mind that the storms of life really blow. What matters is not so much the turmoil outside us as the weather within. To a person with an agitated mind, something as minor as a rude driver can cause enough stress to ruin a day. By contrast I think of Mahatma Gandhi, who gave himself away when he confessed, "I love storms." Gandhi began life as a timid child, but he learned to keep his mind so steady that he could face tremendous crises with courage, compassion, wisdom, and even a sense of humor.

This steadiness of mind is one of the most practical of skills. Without it, no one can face the storm and stress of life without breaking. And life today is storm and stress. We live in the midst of conflicts – within ourselves, at home, in the community, even nationally and internationally. This is an age of conflict, which makes it an age of anxiety as well. Nothing is more vital than learning to face this turmoil with clarity, confidence, and grace.

Fortunately, we don't have to develop these capacities. We already have them. The problem is that we need a calm mind to draw on them. When the mind is agitated or confused, they're simply locked up inside. That is the practical importance of a calm mind.

not be disturbed. Since my cabin was impossible – too cramped and crowded – I prowled about until I discovered the sports deck. No one ventured there until the crew showed up with mops and pails.

On the first morning I made my way to the sports deck in the early hours and settled down for deep meditation. When I finished and opened my eyes, I found myself surrounded by a number of young Australians making cracks at my expense. I didn't mind. If I could provide some entertainment on a boring voyage, I thought, so much the better.

The next couple of days began the same way. But when the monsoon struck and the view started gyrating wildly between sky and sea, my stomach began to follow. I made it through the day, but the next morning I awoke with the sinking sensation that my time had come. My first impulse was to grab a brown bag and join the majority draped over the railings.

But then a second thought popped in. "Wait, you know how

to meditate!"

Somehow I managed to reach the sports deck without incident and sat down for meditation. For a while it was touch and go. But then my mind settled down, and I got absorbed in what mystics call the "sea of peace" within.

## Hidden Gifts

*The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it, yet within reach, is joy. There is radiance and glory in the darkness could we but see, and to see we have only to look. I beseech you to look.*

*Life is so generous a giver, but we, judging its gifts by their covering, cast them away as ugly or heavy or hard. Remove the covering and you will find beneath it a living splendor, woven of love, by wisdom, with power. Welcome it, grasp it, and you touch the angel's hand that brings it to you.*

*Everything we call a trial, a sorrow, or a duty, believe me, that angel's hand is there, the gift is there, and the wonder of an overshadowing presence.*

—FRA GIOVANNI GIOCONDO, 1513

### "I know how to meditate!"

Here I'd like to tell another story about that first voyage.

By the time I left India, I had been meditating for many years and never missed a day. So the first thing I did on boarding ship was to find a place for morning meditation where I would

When I opened my eyes a couple of hours later, my stomach had stopped complaining. It had calmed down along with my mind. I felt on top of the world. With the ship still pitching wildly, I sauntered as best I could into the dining room and sat down to a first-rate breakfast – in solitary dignity, monarch of all I surveyed.

The purser looked on in awe. When I rose to go, he approached with new respect and asked in a conspirator's whisper, "What tablets do you use?"

I wanted to say, "Not medication. Meditation."

#### *Even a child can*

After that, quite a number of the passengers got interested in my "Indian thing." But only one or two wanted to hear the instructions. Meditation is simple and powerful, but it's not easy. It requires a certain daring to attempt to steady the mind day in and day out. In the Bhagavad Gita, in fact, the challenge is compared with trying to tame the wind.

But there is a skill that everyone can learn easily, even a child: repetition of the mantram, or "prayer word" as it is called in some circles in the West. You can think of the mantram as a hand-rail for the mind. It gives your mind something to hold on to, so that you can steady yourself in confusing circumstances until your thoughts become clear.

Repeating the mantram is like calling God collect. If you are averse to religious language, think of it as calling for help from within. Either way, it is an emergency call for deeper resources that are always present but seem invisible in times of trouble. "This is beyond me," we are saying. "I need strength I can't find – I can't even pay for this call. Please send help, and pick up the bill too."

You can draw on the power of the mantram like this at any time,

wherever you happen to be, whatever you happen to be doing. But if you want the mantram to come to your rescue when you need it, if you want it to steady your mind in times of turmoil, you need to practice, practice, practice in calm weather. Whenever you get even a moment free, unless

that upset us even when we know they aren't worth getting upset over. Whenever someone cuts in front of you in traffic, repeat the mantram and don't react. Whenever someone contradicts you, repeat your mantram and hold your tongue. Life graciously provides us with innumerable little

incidents like this, which instead of irritants can become opportunities for spiritual growth. If you go on taking advantage of them as they arise, you can gradually raise your threshold of upsettability higher and higher, until hassles take

## *What matters is not so much the turmoil outside us as the weather within.*

you are doing something that requires attention, repeat your mantram silently to yourself – while waiting, walking, washing dishes, and especially when falling asleep at night. Constant repetition drives the mantram deep into consciousness, so that agitation on the surface cannot shake it loose when you need to hold on.

I must have said this a million times, but it can never be repeated too often. Throughout my life, no matter how assiduously I practiced this skill, I have always been able to find more time, additional opportunities. This is how we gradually extend sovereignty over the mind.

#### *The storms are not outside*

Fascinatingly enough, so far as the mind is concerned, the cause of stress is not important. What matters are the waves of agitation in the mind. Whether we are anxious, panicky, angry, afraid, or simply out of control, the mind is doing the same thing: heaving up and down like the sea.

This is a precious clue. It means that we don't have to prepare for one kind of crisis in this way and another in that way. All we have to do is learn to steady the mind.

We learn this with little challenges – the thousand and one daily irritations

one look and run away.

But life does not consist only of hassles. Whatever popular psychology says, it's not all "small stuff." Coping with these annoyances is just training. The Olympic events are the crises and tragedies – accidents, illness, separation, betrayal, bereavement – that are bound to come in one form or other without warning. That is when we need to know how to find shelter in ourselves, for that is just when external supports are likely to fail.

Teresa of Avila, one of the world's greatest teachers, illustrated this idea of shelter inside us with a famous image. All of us, she says, have a rich and spacious "interior castle" – an inner world that is our real home. Everything we need is stocked there for us to claim. But until we begin the spiritual life, we spend our lives in the courtyard and never even dream of trying the door.

Today, rather than a castle, I like the homier picture of those old Victorian houses that grace some neighborhoods in San Francisco. Imagine owning such a house without an inkling that it belongs to you. You eat your meals on the porch, sleep there, work there, play there, and never think you're missing anything.

Inside you have a comfort-

*Continued  
on next page*

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previous page

able bedroom and a den with a cozy fireplace, but you're used to your sleeping bag. When it rains, you huddle on the porch and shiver. And if someone asks why you don't go inside, you reply, "What's 'inside'? I've lived like this all my life. What else is there?"

The vast majority of human beings live very much like this. Until we learn how to enter the deeper levels of consciousness – as John Donne says, to "be our own home and therein dwell" – we are hopelessly exposed to every storm life brings.

#### *Not insensitivity*

When I talk about being steady in a crisis, I'm not talking about insensitivity. When life strikes serious blows – personal trauma, a death in the family, earthquake, war – no one should be indifferent or feel at ease. In such cases, agitation is only human. What is important is not to be at the mercy of that agitation: to stabilize the mind quickly, so that you can respond to the crisis effectively with courage, love, and wisdom.

Sometimes the storm in the mind is so powerful that it lashes your attention to tatters. That is the sure sign of agitation: concentration becomes impossible, so that every moment you have to keep bringing your mind back to the job at hand.

When you try to meditate or repeat your mantram at such times, you can almost see your mind surging up and down like a stormy sea. And what you are doing is telling the waves of the mind, "Be still." It takes a lot of practice, but gradually the waves rise less and less until finally they subside.

That period can be painful, and even after your mind regains equilibrium, the sorrow may remain. But by then your mind is clear. You are yourself

again, able to be your best even if things look worse.

There is nothing unnatural about this stabilizing process. No matter how hard life strikes, almost everyone regains balance sooner or later. The difference is that when the mind is

### *You not only develop stabilizers in your own mind; you become a stabilizer for others too.*

untrained, we might need days or even weeks to recover. Once you begin to train your mind to be steady, it takes less and less time to get on an even keel again. Finally, like a good helmsman, you will not lose your hold on the wheel even in the roughest sea.

Most precious, perhaps, is how this stabilizing influence affects others. Just as an agitated person disturbs those around him, one person with an even mind helps others to find the same equilibrium in themselves. You not only develop stabilizers in your own mind; you become a stabilizer for others too.

#### *Creative crises*

If I may offer my own small example, I have been struck by very severe blows in the course of my life. The suffering at such times can be intense, especially when the blows seem undeserved or come from those you love. But it is from those trials that I learned to go deep inside myself for strength and consolation. It was a storm of personal tragedies that caused me to turn inward and learn to meditate. That is the real lesson to learn from a crisis: not to rely on any external support, but to find one's own center of strength within.

For a much more significant exam-

ple, I again turn to Gandhi. The "most creative experience" in his life, he tells us, occurred long before he burst onto the world stage as a "mahatma." As a young man on his way to his first job, he was thrown out of a train in South Africa because of his brown skin. The

incident so enraged him that he spent the entire night in turmoil, shivering on the railway platform while a storm raged in his heart.

What should he do? How should he deal with this kind of treatment? He had only arrived in South

Africa a few days before; should he turn around and go back to India? Or should he stay – and if he stayed, should he accept the prejudice as his countrymen did, or should he resist it? And if he chose to resist, how? What could one little man do alone?

Looking back on the shining career that followed this crisis, it is easy to forget that at this point in his life, Gandhi was a timid, ineffectual young man. He did not decide to stay and fight racial prejudice. He simply resolved neither to retaliate nor run away.

But the turmoil of that experience prompted Gandhi to turn inward to find the strength he needed. He began to study passages from India's best-known scripture, the Bhagavad Gita, and to use his mantram at every opportunity. And gradually this led to a complete transformation of character. When Gandhi says he was "born in India but made in South Africa," that is what he means.

"Great emergencies and crises," the psychologist William James observed, "show us how much greater our vital resources are than we had supposed."

This is the opportunity that crisis and challenge offer us. You and I may not be Gandhis, but every one of us has these capacities inside us. That is our legacy as human beings. ☺

## Answering a Call for Help

**B**IG OR small, international or personal, stress and crisis are the texture of our days. Life seems punctuated by events that stretch us to the limit and beyond. Dorian Dugger tells us how her spiritual practice helped her care for her family during such a time, and how, in the process, she discovered a hidden reservoir of strength and endurance.

"A few winters ago we had a very early unexpected snow in the Blue Ridge Mountains where I live. That afternoon, my husband Swede and I were tracking the storm on the weather channel when the phone rang. It was my

brother Lee calling. His first words were 'Mathew is dead. My son is dead.' Mathew was fourteen years old and my brother's only son. Still in shock, Lee told us that Mathew had been on his way home from school after an early dismissal when the driver lost control. The van slid over a steep embankment just before a bridge. Mathew passed away shortly after arriving at the hospital.

"I assured my brother I'd be there

right away and immediately started saying my mantram for Mathew, since I had learned at one of the Blue Mountain Center retreats that this is especially helpful for those who have just passed on. I was stunned, in disbelief. Then waves of grief for my brother's loss swept over me. I knew how dear Mathew was to him. He was not only Lee's son but his dearest companion. After Swede and I talked briefly, I quickly packed and headed very carefully down the mountain to my brother's home.

"For the next two weeks I focused

followed by days packed with cooking, cleaning, running errands, and just offering a shoulder when needed. Miraculously, I managed just fine and always found whatever energy was required.

"I didn't miss a single meditation – I realized I needed them more than ever. They were, by far, some of the most concentrated and still meditations I have ever had. My mantram was truly my staff and I tried very hard to keep it going every minute I could. My practice grew so much through this intense period of putting

the needs of others first, bringing a deeper sense of what Saint Francis of Assisi means when he says, 'It is in giving that we receive.'

"Our family came together as close as we have ever been in the months after Mathew passed away. To me it felt like Mathew's gift to us all.

"At a retreat about six months after the accident, I was able to work through my own



*When Dorian makes the trek from Virginia to the Blue Mountain Center for retreats, her mother Mauryne often joins her from Florida. Recently Dorian accompanied her mom on a Senior retreat.*

*"These seniors are so brave and dedicated!" said Dorian. "What an inspiration."*

entirely on attending to the needs of my brother, his wife, and her daughters. I stayed up until after they went to bed, getting up in the wee hours to meditate while they were still asleep. Many nights I didn't have my evening meditation until well after midnight. Some part of me was always listening to hear the slightest indication that they had woken up and needed something – anything. That meant as little as two to three hours of sleep a night,

grief in just the right way, in just the right environment.

"That whole experience showed me how much all of the little efforts I make every day add up to a huge stockpile of resources that I can draw on when I really need them. I am still amazed by how fully I was sustained and supported by my practice and how that in turn enabled me to help my family so much during that time." ➤



# Calm in a Storm of Criticism

*Sometimes it's hard to believe in our innate creativity, and then to trust that the mantram can help us tap into it in trying circumstances. A high school English teacher told us this story recently about how using her mantram helped her find the perfect response to a not-so-perfect situation.*

**T**WO DAYS ago I had a meeting with a parent who wanted to dispute the B plus I had given her daughter. She showed up so angry and frustrated that I knew she had come for full-fledged war. Sure enough, she began by yelling at me. She said I wasn't qualified, that she went to Harvard and knew more than I do, that I probably hated her child or hated the topic she wrote about.

I could feel my heart pounding and my throat choked with emotion. I just didn't know what to do! Then I remembered my mantram and quickly started repeating it in my mind. I told myself, "Just keep your cool and listen to her. Don't speak too much. Slow down." (When I'm upset I tend to speak fast.) The mantram slowed me down, and that slowed down my breathing and heartbeat a little too.

Of course that didn't stop her. She said she wanted to complain to the principal about me and demanded that I change her daughter's grade to a perfect score. Without thinking, just when everything was mounting to a climax, I gently put my hand on hers. It wasn't a conscious decision; it just came from deep inside.

She immediately stopped yelling and looked me in the eye. Tears started welling up. "I just wanted to be heard," she said. "You know, when it's your own child, everything becomes so personal. I feel like I've failed."

Then she broke down and started crying. "We are on the same team here," I reassured her. "We're both working to help your daughter. Let's work together." She agreed with me and went home light at heart.

The incident lasted just thirty minutes, but it drained me of all my energy. I was totally exhausted. But it taught me a valuable lesson. People just need to vent sometimes, and if I can stay calm and not take it personally, problems will be solved. This situation made me recognize that I have a bit of fear inside me. But I know now that the mantram is there too. ➤

*Among stressful environments, medical school seems to top lists around the world. We received this story from Fleur, a second-year medical student in the Netherlands, who writes, "A recent experience has shown me, once again, how powerful the Eight Point Program is for training the mind."*

**I**AM CURRENTLY interning at a surgery outpatient clinic and have been working like mad: studying anatomy, reading surgery books, practicing with fellow students. Still, the surgeon who is teaching me and five others has been giving us a very difficult time about being unmotivated and slow to learn. A couple of times he was particularly forceful and kept telling us how incompetent we were. What does he expect, I wondered, after only eight months of classes?

After the first week I felt horrible about all the criticism. I took things personally and kept running through his remarks in my mind. I even spent two sleepless nights just dreading going back to the clinic. Because I started to feel insecure about my newly learned skills, I could not talk to my patients in a warm and open way any more.

I realized this was not a very constructive way of learning, and that the biggest problem was the image in my mind. The surgeon had become a big bad wolf. I decided to write down a list of positive things about him, as I learned to do at the Blue Mountain Center last summer. As the list got longer and longer, I came to respect him more and more. I tried another strategy too: not letting myself think or talk about the clinic on my days off. Finally, I tried to close my ears to the complaints of my fellow students, which in a way was the most difficult of all.

The next thing I knew, almost all my fear and insecurity had just melted away. When we met with the professor again, I just repeated my mantram and patiently listened to all the criticism that was poured upon us. I was surprised at how calm I stayed, and I got a glimpse of why this doctor was so frustrated with us – a result I had not expected!

Most importantly, I noticed the difference in my own, more secure, behavior. I think the surgeon noticed too, because miraculously he stopped interrupting me during conversations with patients and did not correct me as often as before – although I was undoubtedly still making mistakes, like shaking hands with a patient who had come in for hand surgery. I think he could see I was putting all my attention on the patients in front of me and sincerely enjoying attending to them. He might have even become slightly milder with us, which made me add one more quality to my list: "compassionate." ➤



# The Gift of Forgiveness

*Another second-year medical student, Elise Sullivan, also found herself facing a stiff challenge, this one in her personal life.*

**F**OR YEARS the holidays have been awkward and uncomfortable due to a strained relationship with a close relative. The two of us have barely been on speaking terms since a bitter divorce in the family many years ago. As Christmastime drew closer I'd find myself more and more anxious, knowing that we'd keep replaying the past, neither of us able to accept the other's version of what had happened. Through meditation I discovered that, although I still couldn't see his point of view, deep down I wanted to forgive him anyway. But I wasn't sure how.

This realization came over the summer, so I had some time. I started my daily meditations with a prayer, asking, "Please help me with this." When thoughts of him came up, I'd repeat my mantram or write a page of mantrams and dedicate them to him.

Finally the holidays arrived, and so did this relative. Unfortunately, despite my good intentions, I fell into the same old patterns. He gave me a present and I just couldn't bring

myself to give him a hug. Then he left a few days early, before I could give him the gift I'd bought for him. I felt like such a brat!

A couple of weeks slipped by, and I asked myself, "Well, are you going to give him the present or not? When is this going to end?" For the first time in five years, I picked up the phone and called him. This was a pretty big step, and took him by surprise, I think. I explained about the gift for him, but true to our old dynamic, he didn't want to accept it. So I just



*Elise Sullivan*

focused on trying to listen to him, and for the first time I could hear – underneath his unwillingness to forgive me – how deeply hurt he was. At that point, the details – what had really happened, who was right or wrong – just didn't seem important. I finally let it all go. And that felt really good.

I'm still working on a tendency to hold on to the past, but this time I was truly able to say, "My life is moving on,

and this is not coming with me." Who knows how long that would have taken without meditation and the mantram, but a lot longer, that's for sure. It seems so easy to be hard on ourselves and others, and such hard work to forgive. But when you have one of those victories – what a gift. ➤

## Let Nothing Upset You

*Longtime meditator Valerie Fontaine sent us this account about transforming discomfort and anxiety to discover a greater capacity for "un-upsetability."*

**I**HAD AN incredible experience recently when I went to have an MRI. With past MRIs, I have had extreme difficulty with claustrophobia – even in the "open" machine. In fact, I've had to be medicated nearly unconscious to be able to cooperate with the procedure. This time I remembered that I had been able to tolerate – and tolerate well – several root canals (another phobia) by meditating on Saint Teresa of Avila's prayer "Let Nothing Upset You" while they were in process. So I decided to do that for the MRI too.

I also decided to not use medication, because I am not able to control my mind with that stuff in me and to meditate I need to control my mind. So I asked for a blindfold, lay perfectly still on the MRI bed in the machine, and meditated for the whole time. Nothing disturbed me. Nothing bothered me. There were times when I could not even hear the MRI – and that is one noisy gadget. When it was all over I was almost floating, in a state of such joy. Wow, what a change! I am so grateful for the Eight Point Program for making it all possible. ➤

# Setting Our Course

**C**HANGE IS woven into our lives. Children are born, and grow up. We lose a job, and get a new one. We

may get married, and divorced. Sometimes we face illness, and feel blessed to recover. Hindu and Buddhist sages say this world we live in is *samsara*, “the sea of change.”

And change can be unsettling, even when the new thing in our lives is something we welcome. Sometimes the waves of change seem to be rising higher than our little boat, and we begin to feel lost. If we practice meditation and are working hard to bring spiritual ideals into our life, however, these will give a direction to our lives that will not alter as the context changes. Spiritual values, deeply held, set our boat on a course toward home, even in the roughest seas.

Having a family is a major life change and brings with it new challenges. Three years ago Max and Tracey Godsil were quite content with how their meditation practice was going and the way their careers were developing. They were

also relieved that their lives were finally getting simpler and slower. But they had always wanted a large family, and when they were blessed with the arrival of triplets in October 2002, they found their lives suddenly transformed. Was it stressful? Yes! Tracey replies.

But this is a household where meditation is a very high priority and that has set the direction of their lives.

Tracey explains, “Our practice looks different now than before we had the kids, when we had more time. It’s not perfect, but we keep trying.”

Max adds, “Having triplets – you know, people say ‘How do you find time to meditate?’ With three toddlers?’ I reply that it would be impossible to have triplets and work in a high-pressure job as I do without meditating and the framework of the Eight Points.

“The question for me isn’t so much finding time to practice. My practice is not optional.”

## *Mantram time*

With little time to herself during the day, Tracey finds that the mantram has taken on a much bigger role in her life. “With the kids my meditation time can be inconsistent and often interrupted, so I’ve put more effort into repeating my mantram. Otherwise, I can get speeded up.

“I really wanted to try my hardest to reinforce repeating it, so I set time aside to write it at night. I bought extra mantram notebooks and put them everywhere – in different rooms in the house and even in the car.

“There are a few things that remind me to repeat my mantram. One is as soon as I notice I’m thinking anything negative. Another is when I get a song in my head from one of the kid’s electric toys, like ‘The Wheels on the Bus.’ That happens a lot.

“The mantram is like



## *Me? Mellow?*

Tracey has always thought of herself and Max as basically hyper-Type A personalities. But other people increasingly take them for calm and relaxed Type Bs. “We try to meet each other for lunch each week,” Tracey says, “to have some time with each other. At one of these lunches I was telling Max about something that was important to me. I thought I was being quite animated, but when the waitress came, she told us, ‘You two are my island of peace.’ Then I looked around and noticed that compared to the other tables in the restaurant, we actually seemed quite mellow. I think now we’re more conscious of not getting caught in the speed of things around us.”



a ticker tape on the TV screen with other thoughts going on behind it. When things are going in all directions around me, I just try to focus on the mantram and what's immediately in front of me that needs attention."

## *It's a wonderful life*

Tracey is convinced that the experience of raising Will, Ally, and

Morgan has helped her to open up her heart more with other people, not just with her kids. And Max now feels like a dad-on-patrol. "He's looking out for other people's kids too now. We've both become more aware of other people and their families. We're concerned for them too.

"Having triplets is really challenging. We just don't have the time to waste a moment during the day. Max and I might be tired or even sick, but it doesn't matter, because they need us. And when we're all sick, we're still the ones who need to help them and comfort them.

"I've learned from raising the children that even when you think you've reached your limit and there's no more gas in the tank – the

reserves are empty – somehow you find the ability to keep going. There are resources there you had no idea you had before."

In a quiet moment Max reflects, "Our spiritual practice gives us the tools we need to help us hang on and not push our self-will on the kids or other people around us.

"I'm not saying that I'm not impatient or that I don't get angry – most of

Tracey explains the joy she sees in watching the children grow and being together as a family. "Even though we have our ups and downs, we can see that the kids are really thriving. It feels good knowing they're starting out in such a good environment. They have the best start in life we could possibly give them. There's joy in seeing their enjoyment and sense of wonder as they discover the world

around them. The joy in all of this is them just being here with us and our relationship with them. They are a part of us. They're as close to us as our right arm, yet they're also unique and independent, like an acorn and a tree."

With the triplets, Tracey and Max have got a taste of the unconditional love embodied by the great mystics. "As



*Ally, Will, and Morgan*

Max describes a typical evening at home: "At bath time, toddlers can be remarkably resourceful and fast, and slippery when wet. There's something instinctually human about running around naked and screaming. It's a much more powerful drive in the young than, say, the urge to sleep. When they work together, there's no way you can win. I sit on the couch with a diaper in hand, waiting for one to pass by close enough, and I lunge. Sometimes I get lucky. And then it's a half-hour wrestling match to get on their PJs. And that can be just one kid. The mantram comes in handy."

my life is lived on the edge right now; that's just the way it is. But without the mantram and the other spiritual disciplines, I would be lost. Spending time with Easwaran via the videos, meditation, and reading the *Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living* every morning has helped me to develop an insight into human behavior. This gives me detachment – from other people's actions and words, and from my own mind and even physical discomfort."

much as we try to have unconditional love for our parents or spouses, with the kids it comes so naturally; all we want for them is the best. It's so hard to see them unhappy, not because it puts us out, but because we're sad for them.

"At its best, it's like there is no separation or distinction between us. It's all of us being together as one. It's the purest form of love I've ever experienced." ☺





## ISN'T IT TIME FOR A NEW KIND OF ACTION HERO?

No bulging muscles. A slight build. Small in stature. And yet, when it comes to displaying the qualities of a superhero, no man in modern history comes closer than Gandhi. He turned back vast armies without firing a shot. He carried an entire country on his back. He proved that the human will is mightier than the sword.

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## RETREAT SCHEDULE 2005

<b>MAY</b>	1	One-Day, Kyoto, Japan
	13–15	Weekend, Boston, MA
	14	One-Day, Boston, MA
	20–22	Weekend, Tomales, CA
<b>JUNE</b>	11	One-Day, Lewes, UK
	17–19	Weekend, New York, NY
	18	One-Day, New York, NY
	18	One-Day, Voorschoten, Netherlands
	24–26	Weekend, Tomales, CA
<b>JULY</b>	2–8	Young Adult Weeklong, Tomales, CA
<b>AUG</b>	6–12	Weeklong, Tomales, CA
	19–21	Weekend, Tomales, CA
	26–28	Weekend, Denver, CO
	27	One-Day, Denver, CO
<b>SEP</b>	16–20	Senior Half-Week, Tomales, CA
	16–18	Weekend, Chicago, IL
	17	One-Day, Chicago, IL
<b>OCT</b>	1–7	Weeklong, Tomales, CA
<b>NOV</b>	11–13	Young Adult Weekend, Tomales, CA
<b>DEC</b>	2–4	Weekend, Tomales, CA

### ◀ Getting the Word Out

*When the Blue Mountain Center had the opportunity to place an ad in a prominent magazine, our thoughts turned to a highly talented copywriter, Max Godsil (see article on page 10). We imagined he'd write a few paragraphs to help us spread the word about Easwaran's books.*

*Max took up the assignment enthusiastically and came up with an idea for one of his favorites: Gandhi the Man. His enthusiasm was evidently infectious at his end too. We soon learned that his boss at a top ad agency had granted approval for him and several interested co-workers to donate work time and materials to the project.*

*After the result, which appears on the opposite page, had been run, the editors told us that for the first time a subscriber had sent in a letter praising an ad!*

*Here at the Center we have received several rave reviews, including a note from a college tennis coach who put the ad up on the locker room wall to inspire his team.*

*In response to one inquiry, however, we hope we didn't disappoint: The lunch box is not for sale. Yet.*

# Meditation Retreats

## Weekend Retreats with Introductory & In-Depth Workshops

*Prerequisites for intensive workshops: Half-hour meditation daily for one year using Eknath Easwaran's method and attendance at a BMCM retreat.*

*Friday 4:00 p.m. to Sunday 2:00 p.m.  
\$295 includes the program, vegetarian meals, and lodging at our retreat house in Tomales, California*

Our weekend retreats offer both introductory and intensive workshops.

New to meditation? Our weekend retreats with introductory workshops introduce newcomers to this practical method for improving daily life.

Have you been meditating regularly? Weekend retreats with in-depth workshops will rejuvenate your enthusiasm for the Eight Point Program and bring new insights to your practice.

*"I now can see more clearly the long road ahead of me, but I feel like a traveler well-stocked with provisions. Your presentation of the Eight Point Program will help keep me going for a long time."*

## Weeklong In-Depth Retreats

*Prerequisites: Half-hour meditation daily for one year using Eknath Easwaran's method and attendance at a BMCM retreat.*

*Saturday 4:00 p.m. to Friday 2:00 p.m.  
\$650 includes the program, vegetarian meals, and lodging at our retreat house in Tomales, California*

These comprehensive retreats bring dedicated seekers together and provide special support for incorporating Easwaran's Eight Point Program into your work and family life.

The experienced guidance of Easwaran's longtime students can spark renewed commitment to the spiritual life. A full week of concentrated learning, the fellowship of earnest seekers, and three group meditations each day combine to make a life-transforming experience.

*"I couldn't have hoped for a more positive experience. It has propelled my meditation practice forward significantly, as well as my practice of the other seven points."*





## Young Adult Weekend Retreats

*Prerequisite: Ages 18–35*

*Friday 4:00 p.m. to*

*Sunday 2:00 p.m.*

*\$295 (\$150 for students)*

*Includes all meals and lodging*

Do you want to

- \* *make good decisions for your future?*
- \* *find deeper meaning in your work and relationships?*
- \* *build your life in tune with your highest ideals?*
- \* *find your overriding purpose in life?*

Our Young Adult retreats explore how to use the Eight Point Program to achieve these goals. Group meditations, workshops, and free time combine to open up new avenues for future growth.

*“Just being with other young adults and seeing that they are out there trying to live the spiritual life brings such happiness and inspiration.”*

## Young Adult In-Depth Weeklong Retreats

*Prerequisite: A half hour of meditation daily for 6 months*

*Saturday 4:00 p.m. to*

*Friday 2:00 p.m.*

*\$650 (students \$350) includes the program, vegetarian meals, and lodging at our retreat house in Tomales, California*

Our in-depth weeklong program especially adapted to the needs of young people.

## Senior Retreats

*Prerequisite: Age 65 or older*

*Friday 4:00 p.m. to*

*Tuesday 9:00 a.m.*

*\$350 includes all meals and lodging*

Let your senior years blossom into a time of inner growth and transformation. Learn how to

- \* *make important life changes and choices*
- \* *find deeper meaning in life*
- \* *be free to pursue your highest ideals*
- \* *find peace, love, and forgiveness*

Our Senior retreats teach and support the practice of meditation and the Eight Point Program with special application to the concerns of seniors. Workshops led by Sri Easwaran's long-time students present techniques for using the program to see more clearly the forces that shape our lives and to begin today to create a better future.

## Regional Retreats

*One-Day Regional Retreats*

*Saturday 9:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.*

*\$95 includes a vegetarian lunch and dinner*

*Weekend Regional Retreats*

*Friday 4:00 p.m. to*

*Sunday 2:00 p.m.*

*\$295 includes vegetarian meals and lodging*

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Come to learn this dynamic method for personal transformation. Presenters with many years of meditation experience lead group instruction in the Eight Point Program, focusing on benefits in daily life. Meet others practicing the Eight Point Program in your community.

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October 1-7: Weeklong

November 11-13: Young Adult Weekend

December 2-4: Weekend

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June 18: Voorschoten, Netherlands

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**In Petaluma, California** Every Tuesday evening we offer a free program beginning with a workshop at 7:00 p.m., followed by a videotaped talk by Eknath Easwaran at 8:00 and a half hour of meditation ending by 9:00. This program is held at the United Church of Christ, 825 Middlefield Drive, Petaluma, California. Directions: Traveling either north or south on Highway 101, take the Petaluma Boulevard South exit. Drive 1.2 miles north into Petaluma. Turn left at the first stoplight; this is McNear Street. Drive 1 block, turn right on Mission, drive 1 block, and turn left on

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**In Berkeley, California** The program begins at 6:30 p.m. with a workshop, followed by a videotaped talk by Eknath Easwaran and a half hour of meditation ending at 8:00 p.m. It is held on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, 2304 McKinley (corner of Bancroft): April 26; May 10, 24.