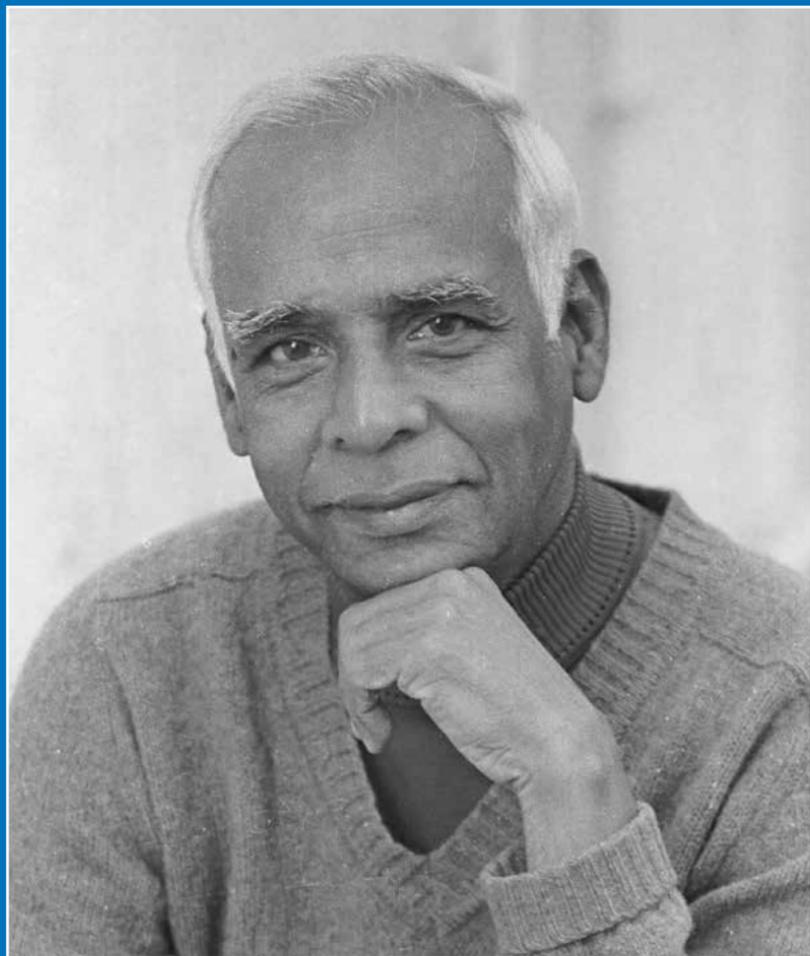


Eknath Easwaran's

Blue Mountain Journal

Meditation & Spiritual Living



Spring 2016

An End to Loneliness

Spiritual Fellowship & Spiritual Reading



In This Issue

The fellowship of others following the same path, Easwaran writes, “is an essential part of the spiritual life.... It should not be considered a luxury or indulgence.” That is why he made satsang, spiritual fellowship, the seventh point in his eight-point program.

Over the years we at the Blue Mountain Center have made this a high priority. The Internet has helped enormously: beyond our retreats here in Tomales, we now offer eSatsangs, webinars, and a new Blue Mountain Blog (see pp. 46–47), as well as a dedicated email forum for discussing topics raised in this journal (see sidebar, p. 16). Today it’s easier than ever for a serious meditator to find fellowship along the way.

In this issue we broaden spiritual support to include what Easwaran calls “the company of saints and sages”: the great mystics of all religions, whom we discover in our practice of the last point in his program, spiritual reading – and, of course, in the inspired words of the passages we use in meditation every day. Thus we are led back to the first point, the whole point, of Easwaran’s program, meditation. As we move closer to our goal, he assures us, we become a stranger to loneliness, at home wherever we go.

Christine Easwaran

For the Board of Trustees

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A Stranger to Loneliness

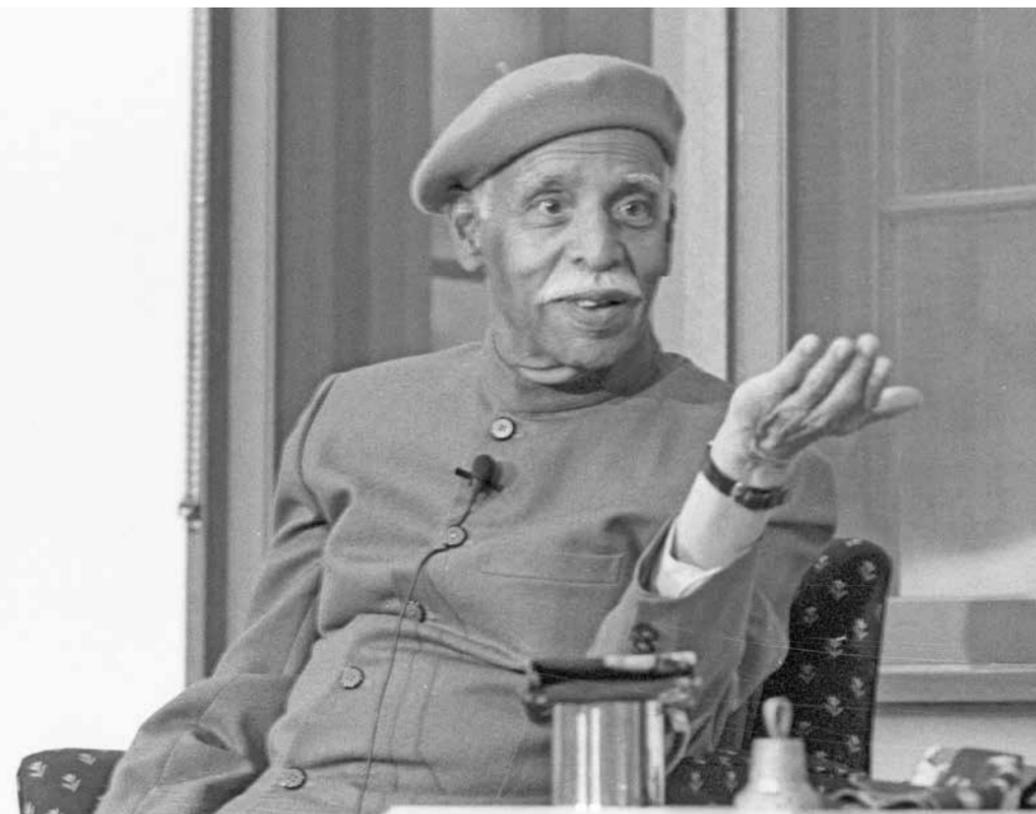
“Once you realize the Self,” the Upanishads say, “you will never be lonely again.” You become a stranger to loneliness, an utter stranger. When you are with people, naturally you are at one with them, but when you are alone too, you are at one with the world. You’re always relating to everything around—to people, to animals, to birds, to nature—in an integral way.

I enjoy being with people, but this is not a kind of social enjoyment. It is not even a kind of intellectual enjoyment. It’s a kind of enlightened rapture of being one ... always.

In the early days of my intellectual career, which was very satisfying, I used to be at home in a small circle who shared my passion for certain poets or certain playwrights, but it was only in that circle, and that too for a limited period. Now I relate to everybody.

I can’t tell you the joy of this. I can be in any country on the face of the earth, I can be with any people, and I will always feel deeply that these are my people. I have got to live for them. Millions of people would give anything just to have this state of fullness—of always belonging and always knowing that you’re an integral part of the indivisible whole. This is the answer to the problem of loneliness, and it is one of the first fruits when you discover who you are.





Photos: Easwaran taking questions at a retreat, 1988.

Q: I love all that you teach, but sometimes I feel so alone on this path. Most of my friends don't meditate. Do you have any advice for people like me?

Eknath Easwaran answers:

Meditation is often presented as a pleasant experience in which you hear birds singing and see flowers blooming while you float along in a wonderland. Actually, floating in a wonderland is just the opposite of meditation. In order to learn to meditate, you have to put in a great deal of work. For a month or two the person who has just taken to meditation will tell you all about how grand it is. But it is only fair to point out that, once you really get started, this initial surge of enthusiasm is going to wane.

Not long ago I watched the news coverage of the annual Bay to Breakers run, from one side of San Francisco to the other. And what enthusiasm at the start! Everyone bouncing along with jaunty, springing steps, grinning at the spectators, scanning the competition for an attractive face... this is the life!

The next morning, though, I read about the aftermath. Fifteen thousand may have started, but thousands never finished. It helps to know at the outset that you will be running a marathon in this program, not simply jogging once or twice around a track.

To guard against such ups and downs, I would make a number of suggestions...

1 | Put your meditation first

Right from the outset, it is important to do everything we can to make Self-realization our primary goal. The transformation of personality is so difficult that to accomplish it we cannot afford to dedicate ourselves to other objectives and try to practice sadhana on the side.

To rebuild our lives, we have to change our associations and our ways of living.

In the early days, however, this often means a change in some of our familiar activities. Several old acquaintances will gradually fade from our circle. Someone once asked Somerset Maugham “Should old acquaintance be forgot?” Maugham replied drily, “Sometimes.” To rebuild our lives, we have to change our associations and our ways of living.

This is painful at first. When I took to meditation I made a number of far-reaching changes in my life, which naturally baffled a lot of my friends, who began to look askance at some of these changes. They were fond of me and thought perhaps I was losing my ambition and my drive. What I did was try not to be affected by this, not in any way to be apologetic or to impose my views on others. In a few years’ time they saw the changes I had been able to bring into my daily living and one by one they would seek my company, perhaps to ask my advice on daily problems.

For a while you’ve got to be prepared for questioning and sometimes even bewilderment from those who are near and dear to you. It calls on the one hand for a great deal of security within yourself and on the other hand for a great deal of discrimination.

2 | Seek fellowship with other meditators

Desire for the company of spiritually oriented people comes naturally once we take to meditation. We are beginning to change inside, often dramatically; it is natural that our tastes and desires should be changing too. As the desire to know ourselves becomes stronger and stronger, we'll be looking in the paper not to find a good movie but to find a talk on meditation. When we go to a bookstore, we'll pass by the bestseller tables to get to the religion or self-help sections. And we will be looking everywhere for the company of others who are dedicated to the spiritual life—not intellectually interested, but actually practicing disciplines like my eight-point program.

The Buddha would say that most people throw themselves into the river of life and float downstream, moved here and there by the current. But the spiritual aspirant must swim upstream, against the current of habit, familiarity, and ease. It is an apt image. We know how the salmon fights its way along, returning at last to its original home. Those who set out to change themselves are salmon swimming against the relentless flow of the selfish life. Truly, we need every bit of support we can get; we need friends, loyal companions on the journey. We have to do the swimming, of course; nobody else can do it for us. But there will be an easier and swifter passage if we can swim with those who encourage us, who set a strong pace and will not stop until they reach their destination. The burdens are shared, easing them; the joys are shared too, multiplying them.

We need every bit of support we can get; we need friends on the journey.





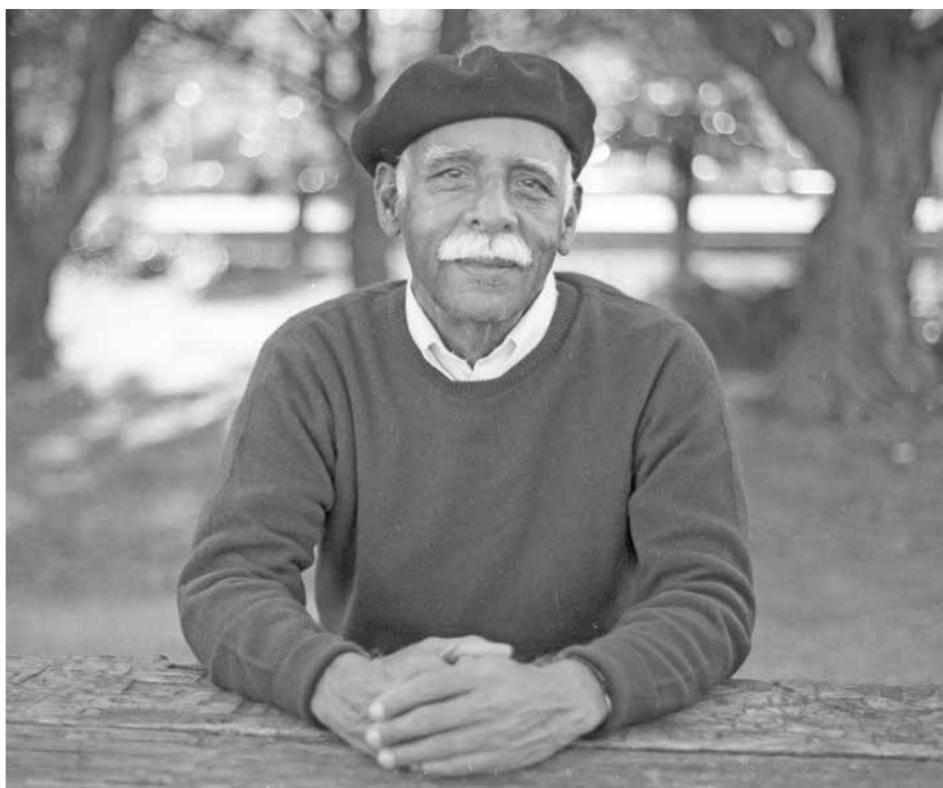
In Sanskrit, this sharing is called *satsang*. The word derives from two smaller words: *sat*, meaning “the good” or “truth” or “reality,” and *sanga*, meaning “group” or “association.” Thus it signifies the seekers of the highest, banded together.

This kind of support is vital as meditation deepens. There will be gulfs where we have to leap across, precipices we have to climb just like a mountaineer. Climbers protect themselves by tying ropes to one another so that even if one person slips, the others can provide support. That is just what *satsang* means.

**Wherever
people meditate
together, a
healing force
is released.**

If you are following my eight-point program, my practical suggestion would be to make time to meditate as often as possible with others on the same path. You may read together for a short while or watch one of our videos, but the most important part is meditation. Wherever people meditate together, a healing force is released that deepens the experience for all. As Jesus says, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am present in the midst of them.”

One of the important reasons for our Blue Mountain Center retreats is to provide this kind of rendezvous, where people who are searching for the supreme purpose of life can support one another and share companionship on this demanding journey. I am always pleased to hear from friends that our retreats are like an oasis for them, where they can find living waters and return home refreshed.



Easwaran in Sausalito, 1984.

A satsang journey

I first heard of Sri Easwaran through two women at a church I was briefly attending; they had discovered the local satsang that met there. I went home that night and ordered a copy of *Passage Meditation*. But I left the church, and put the book on a shelf where it remained for four years until I heard another couple in a 12-step meeting talking about a great meditation group they'd found through an article in the local newspaper.

The couple announced this meditation group in two different meetings, and I became more and more interested, asking a lot of questions. I had just missed the introductory course, but somehow knew it was that same satsang group from four years ago. I checked on my shelf, and there was my unread copy of *Passage Meditation* and Sri Easwaran patiently waiting for me.

I called the satsang coordinator and was told I'd need to read the book and meditate for 30 days on my own before attending. So I did! That was June, 2011, and satsang has been growing for me ever since. I began attending the local meditation group immediately.

I also began attending retreats at Tomales within the first year, starting with a weekend. At that retreat, I was encouraged to attend a weeklong, which I did shortly afterwards. Every year I've been able to attend retreats at Tomales, which I'm so very grateful for! Retreats are wonderful places to meet other passage meditators from all over the world, and I've met friends from other parts of the local states as well.

Wanting to enrich connections with my meditating friends, I also attended a regional retreat for three years.

I found the eSatsang early on, which has helped me feel connected at all times, whether on the road or wherever I am. There have been times when I couldn't physically attend a satsang for a few weeks, but knowing the eSatsang is always there helped me weather some hectic storms! It also introduced me to the video collection that is

available as well as opening up many other books by Sri EE that I would not have gotten into so quickly. Each week, I print the eSatsang and think about the experiment or question of the week every day. Almost daily and certainly when life gets too hectic, I've found it very calming and inspiring to watch 15–30 minutes of one of the videos in order to obtain support and share 'darshan' with Sri Easwaran.

The Blue Mountain journal has also been a wonderful avenue for satsang, especially since the online discussion groups have become available. I've recently looked at the website for early copies of the journal that are available to all, as I find the articles so inspiring.

Our website is so full of resources that I return to it again and again!! I've found the new webinars to be extremely helpful as well; even though I've been practicing a few years, I always hear something new that I can incorporate into my practice. I very much enjoy reading the Young Adult blog, now the Blue Mountain Blog. It's so wonderful that we can learn from each other!!

I've now become one of the coordinators for my local satsang, and working together as a team has greatly enhanced my feeling of satsang within our group. We are extremely fortunate to have a large, vibrant group, and we're also within a two hour drive to Tomales. Many of us just attended the local regional retreat together, another wonderful time for fellowship together with friends, newly discovered as well as from our group or other retreats.

In the coming months, I'll be joining the Family Online Program as well as the Affiliate Program. I know that each of these opportunities to share and grow together will greatly enhance and deepen my practice of the eight points. I am eternally grateful to Sri Easwaran, Christine, the entire BMCM Staff, and all of you for being and sharing satsang with me!! Thank you!

A journal reader

3 | Protect the seedling ...

When a seedling is planted in the countryside, it is fenced in so it will have some protection. Similarly, as spiritual seedlings, it is a good idea to surround ourselves with the protection of others who are spiritually minded.

In Sanskrit there is a pithy saying that was on the tip of my grandmother's tongue every year when school began. At the end of the day I would run home to tell her who I had been with and what we had done that day. "You don't have to tell me who you have been with," she would say. "I can tell."

"All right, Granny, who?"

She would proceed to name every one of them. And she was always right. "Granny," I would ask in amazement, "how did you know?"

And she would reply, "*Samsargad doshaguna bhavanti*"—which means, roughly, "We become like those we hang out with."

Granny wasn't one to waste words, so it was only when I learned to meditate that I began to understand what she was trying to tell me. Much more than words or behavior, Granny was talking about character—the influences on the mind that shape the kind of person we are becoming, for better and for worse.

According to this ancient Sanskrit saying, what is good in us and what is bad, our strong points and our weak points alike, develop because of constant association. When we associate with calm people, we become calm; when we associate with agitated people, we become agitated. When we frequent the company of people who are wise, we become wiser; when our company is otherwise, we become otherwise too.

We become like those we hang out with.

I want to be like those people

I am blessed to have a spouse who also follows this practice and who daily provides me with an excellent example of how to lead a good and spiritual life.

As our practice has deepened, we have certainly seen a change in our relationship with our friends. We are no longer interested in some of their ways of socializing. As we no longer watch the “news,” and rarely read about it, we often have little to contribute to what people seem to want to talk about at parties. I have been much more drawn to building connections with BMCM followers whom I have met at retreats or on the eSatsang. We mainly correspond by email, and often include inspirational articles, passages or quotations. I or we have been able to get together socially with a few of these people, and that has been very rewarding and inspiring.

Both my wife and I include spiritual reading as a part of our daily practice, especially at night as the last thing that we read before sleep. Both with my BMCM fellowship and with my spiritual reading, I am very often left with the thought, “I want to be like those people.”

A member of our eSatsang



With Christine Easwaran (left) at a BMCM event.

We need to build deep relationships with those who welcome the changes we are trying to make.

If you want to be secure and selfless, the Buddha says, associate with people who are reasonably secure and selfless, and learn to be like them in their daily living example. By association we can become good, by association we can become selfless, by association we can elevate ourselves to a nobler way of life.

When I say we need to be selective in our company, I am not talking about withdrawing into a little group and refusing to have any contact with people who do not do as we do. We should be courteous and friendly with everyone, aware of their feelings and points of view, and avoid being judgmental. I am stressing the need to build deep relationships with those who welcome the changes we are trying to make and who will help us make them.

In time, of course, when our new ways of thought, speech, and action have taken a firm hold, we can stand in any company without being uprooted. Far from returning to our old patterns of conditioning, we will influence others by our personal example to change their patterns as well.

Join our discussion group

Email us at journal@easwaran.org to join our journal discussion group on spiritual fellowship and spiritual reading. All are welcome!

4 | ...but don't cut yourself off

I would also emphasize the need to be with people and to contribute to life around you. When you are meditating regularly, you need the counterpoise of being with family and friends.

As you begin to taste the security and joy within, you may develop the tendency to bask in this inward state. From my own experience, I would say that this is just the time to turn your attention outwards. Unless we maintain close relationships with those around us, there is the danger of getting caught inside, locked within the lonely prison of the ego. To learn to live in harmony with others, to feel at home with everyone, we need the close ties of a wide circle of family and friends. None of us can afford to retire into ourselves and do our own thing if we want to become aware of the unity of life.

You occasionally hear it said that spiritual aspirants should drop everything and set off for the woods, or go to India and wander about on the slopes of the Himalayas. But only through daily contact with people—not trees or brooks or deer—can we train ourselves to be selfless in personal relationships.

When we keep company with those who are spiritually minded, we help each other grow through mutual support and example. Yet since we are all human, we give each other plenty of opportunity for developing patience too. Either way, we move forward.

Only through daily contact with people can we train ourselves to be selfless in personal relationships.

5 | Seek the company of saints and sages

On the spiritual path, we all need the human companionship of others following the same disciplines. But we also need transcendent companionship. The highest form of spiritual association is with someone who embodies our highest ideals and aspirations, someone we want to be like in every possible way. It might be Jesus or the Compassionate Buddha; it might be a great saint like Sri Ramakrishna, Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, or Thérèse of Lisieux.

In the Indian tradition, the human soul in its search for God is represented as a beautiful woman named Radha who is always meditating on Sri Krishna. When the Lord appears to her one day, Radha is so overwhelmed that she tells him, “I love you so much, I meditate upon you so passionately, that one day I am going to become you!” And Sri Krishna replies delightfully, “Radha, I love you so much and think about you so much that the day you become Krishna, I am going to become Radha.”

We become like those we love.

This is the real principle of satsang: we become like those we love. If I can in any way account for the small measure of spiritual awareness that has come to me, the only explanation I can offer is that I loved my spiritual teacher, my mother’s mother, so deeply that I made it possible for her to convey to me a small part of her awareness of God. Today, in a very small way, I have become like her—not because of any special virtues I might have had, but because I loved her so utterly that I absorbed some of her consciousness through a kind of spiritual osmosis. In this sense, spiritual awareness is not taught; it is caught.

This does not require a physical presence. Jesus, the Buddha, great sages and saints like Sri Ramakrishna, Mahatma Gandhi, Teresa of Avila, Francis of Assisi, all continue to guide us. They are not dead. Their bodies are gone, but their spirit moves about freely in the world, helping those who turn to them with a unified heart.

Similarly, my teacher is much more real to me today than she was when I was a child. And for Francis and Teresa, Jesus was a friend with whom they conversed intimately, just as Sri Ramakrishna did with the Divine Mother.

Even for people like you and me, luminous figures like these in every religion can be living companions—much more real, much more influential, than flesh and blood friends whose lives are scattered. By reading about them, thinking about them, meditating on their words, we can bring their presence into our daily lives.

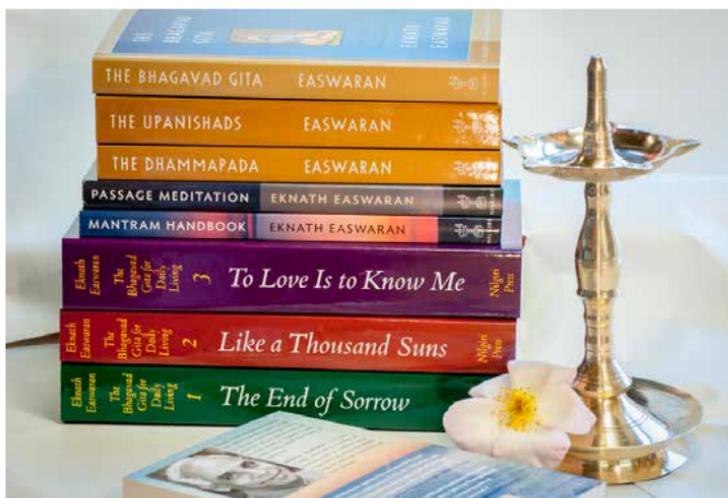
Whenever our confidence ebbs—for most of us as frequently as the ebbing of the sea—we can turn to the words of these men and women of God and renew our hearts, draw fresh breath, and bring back into sight our supreme goal. Their trials put our obstacles into perspective, and their triumphs give us courage. We see just what we can be as human beings: our capacity to choose, to change, to endure, to know, to love, to radiate spiritual glory. Personally, I never tire of reading these precious documents. How blessed it is to be in the holy presence of a Saint Teresa or a Sri Ramakrishna!

These luminous figures can be living companions.

6 | Read widely, but distinguish between inspiration and instruction

The treasures of mysticism can be found in all religions, and we should not confine ourselves to the tradition most familiar to us. No one age, no one people, no one persuasion has any monopoly on spiritual wisdom; the prize is there, and always has been, for any man or woman who cares and dares to look for it. Of course, whichever mystic we turn to, we will meet the same truths, because the mystical experience is everywhere the same. There is only one supreme reality, and there can be only one union with it. But the language, tradition, mode of expression, and cultural flavor will differ. In this lies the beauty of spiritual literature: on the one hand it reflects the fascinating diversity of life; on the other, the unchanging principles that stand behind that diversity, irrespective of time and place.

And if you want to know the mystical tradition, don't rely on books about the mystics; go directly



to the great mystics themselves. A scholarly presentation may have its place, but personal testimonies are infinitely more helpful.

Here, however, it is helpful to draw a practical distinction. On the one hand, there are books we read primarily for inspiration. They can be glorious, we need them, but taken together they encompass diverse ideas, disciplines, and methods of meditation. If we try to follow the exact letter of what we read—say, this week the Hasidic masters, next week Saint Anthony—we will be dancing and singing for seven days and living on bread and water for the next seven. So the other kind of spiritual reading I call instructional—the works which actually bring us the detailed advice of our spiritual teacher. We should draw freely on the classics of all great mystical traditions for inspiration, but this should never take the place of reading and rereading the instructions we are trying to follow in our daily lives.

Mixing instructions just doesn't work!

There's a Zen Buddhist author whom I like very much—he wrote a marvelous biography of the Buddha. But when I read a small book of his on dealing with anger, I got confused. The techniques he recommended were quite different from those I'd learned from reading Easwaran. At first I thought I could make my own blend, but then I realized I was ending up doing nothing, from either author! So now I read Easwaran for instruction, and other favorite spiritual writers for inspiration.

A journal reader



7 | Read our books for instruction

Sometimes, when I look back over the books I have written, I think how much easier it would have been for me if such books had been available when I was learning to meditate. And that is why I have written them. Our book on meditation, for example—I would have given anything to have this kind of guide at hand to answer my questions, and there was nothing like it available. It would have helped me so much!

All my books have been written for the same basic reason: to support those who are trying to put this eight-point program into practice. They are written entirely from personal experience, both in following this program myself and in teaching it in this country for more than twenty-five years.

All of my books are practical, and their sole purpose is to help readers make their highest ideals a part of their daily lives. You can find many writers on spiritual topics who present theories, speculations, opinions, or beliefs. Some of these books are scholarly, and valuable in their own right. But I write only about the actual practice of spiritual disciplines, and you can be confident that if I recommend something, I have been doing it myself for many, many years and have seen it work, not only in my own life but in the lives of thousands of people whom I have taught. Over the years, I have become intimately familiar with the difficulties and challenges people experience as their meditation deepens, and my books anticipate their questions.

A longtime friend at a BMCM event.



Christine Easwaran with a friend at a BMCM event.

Testing spiritual understanding

Much of our lives are spent in understanding what life is all about. What is our purpose in life? Where do we come from? Where do we go? Easwaran's books provide me with a hypothesis to test over the course of my spiritual practice. Whenever I am in doubt about something, in conflict about something, struggling with afflictive emotions I refer to the many wonderful books from Easwaran to identify a hypothesis to put to the test. My favorite books from Eknath Easwaran are:

1. *Conquest of Mind* – The first book I read which gave me light during a very challenging part of my life. When I couldn't find answers from conventional sources I turned to this book and I am most grateful for it.

2. *Passage Meditation* – I constantly brush up my reading when I feel I have forgotten some important aspects of the 8PP.

3. *The Upanishads* – Another one of my bedside reading books, some of the pages fill my heart with joy and renew my desire to vanquish self-will.

4. *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living* – I generally read a passage before going to bed, it also fills my heart with joy at the splendor of the Lord.

5. *Patience* – Helpful reminders time and again of the virtues of patience and its place in our spiritual practice.

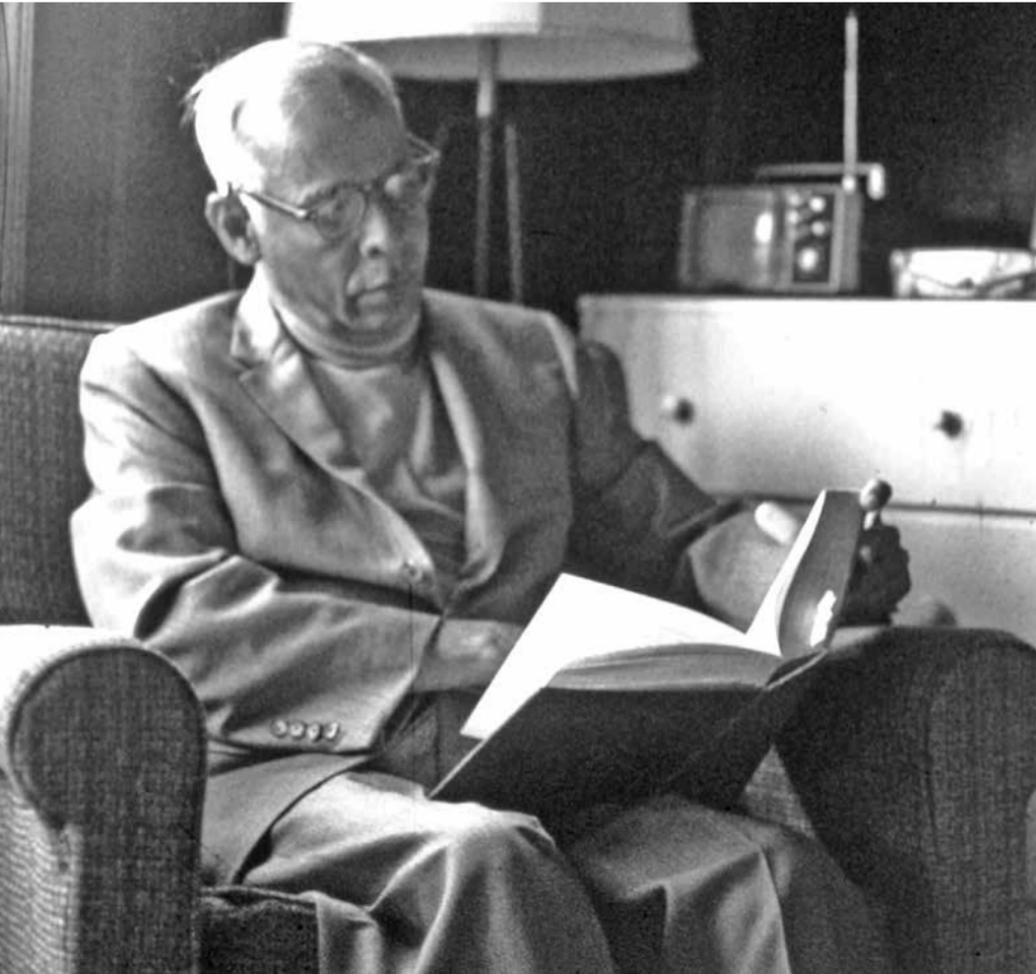
6. *Take Your Time* – Helpful reminders of the virtues of slowing down and its place in our spiritual practice.

7. *God Makes the River to Flow* – Rich passages for meditation.

I subscribe to the video downloads for the month and watching and listening to Easwaran helps nourish my will and desire to make the inner transformation for the benefit of all around me.

I try to get 30 minutes of reading in prior to bed. Although being newly married and getting a pet I find I have to actively make time to read and watch Easwaran's videos.

A member of our Young Adult eSatsang



Easwaran, early 1970s.

8 | Read slowly, and reflect

Even an ordinary book, of course, is not complete without a reader. A great book, coming from the depths of one person's consciousness, has little or nothing to say to a superficial reading. It needs to speak to depth: "deep calleth unto deep."

Books chosen from the annals of mysticism should be read slowly and well. We are not after information, but understanding and inspiration. Take in a little every day, reflect on it, and then try to practice what you have learned. In spiritual reading, too, it takes time to assimilate the truths we meet. Far better to read a few books and make them your own than to read many books quickly and superficially.

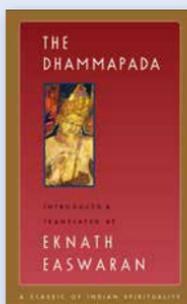
I have found spiritual reading especially beneficial after evening meditation. When I have finished, I go to bed and repeat the mantram until I fall asleep in it. The reason for this sequence is simple: what we put into consciousness in the evening goes with us into sleep. If we use this valuable time to fill our mind with agitating stuff from books, movies, or television shows, that is what we will see and hear in our dreams. On the other hand, if we follow this nightly sequence of meditation, spiritual reading, and repetition of the mantram, our dreams will gradually reflect an evening wisely spent. We will grow in patience, security, wisdom even while we sleep.

I suggest, then, that you include half an hour's reading every day, preferably at night. If this is not possible, have fifteen minutes. Probably you will soon want more time for such reading. It will become something you hunger for—rather like your dinner, which I am sure you don't care to miss.

**We will grow
in patience,
security, wisdom
even while
we sleep.**



Staff Picks



President's Office: *The Dhammapadam*

I love the introduction to Easwaran's translation of the Dhammapadam. It is no ordinary introduction; it's ninety pages packed full of insight that conveys his personal sense of the Buddha, Buddhism, and eastern spiritual concepts such as karma, reincarnation, and nirvana. The highlight for me is Easwaran's intimate description of the spiritual journey through the four stages of enlightenment—one no doubt he has taken himself and now describes to us in revealing detail. It's a description both

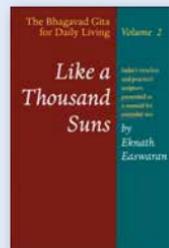


What We're Reading Right Now

thrilling and inspiring that leaves us with, as Easwaran says, “a precise account of levels of awareness beneath the everyday waking state... a concise map of his journey to nirvana.”

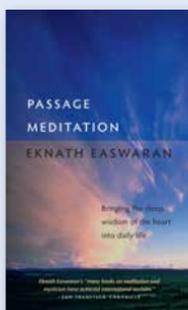
Press Department: *Like a Thousand Suns*

I'm currently reading (and re-reading) *Like a Thousand Suns*, my favorite of the three volumes. I love the constant reminders of the Upanishadic sages' descriptions of the origins of the cosmos, which, every year, seem to get closer and closer



to modern cosmologists' theories. However, it is of course Easwaran's soaring spiritual guidance, especially powerful in this volume, which sticks. Just one example:

“Forgiveness means learning to draw upon the deeper powers in our consciousness and change the wrong ways of thinking that have conditioned us to make these mistakes. No matter what we may have done in the past, it is always possible for us to change. That is why the mystics say that the Lord’s forgiveness is always held out for us to take. But the choice to reach out and take it is left to us.”



Editorial Department: *Passage Meditation*

I'm going through our flagship book again, because we'll be issuing a new expanded edition in the autumn. I still find it unexpectedly moving in places, even though I've read it so many times. I love the preface, with Easwaran's very personal account of his arduous spiritual journey. Re-reading the instructions in meditation always highlights something to work on in my practice. And who can resist Easwaran's last lines from chapter one:

“I haven't tried to conceal the fact that learning to control your mind is difficult—the most difficult thing in the world. But I want to remind you always that what you are seeking is glorious beyond compare, something far beyond my capacity, or anybody's, to render into thoughts and words. In my heart I have no greater desire than that you should reach the goal. Accept my wish for your great success!”

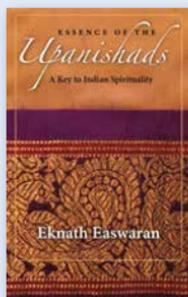
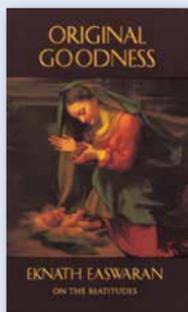
Development Department: *Original Goodness*

Last month a friend suggested this book for an informal reading study with two other friends. I was familiar with it—or so I thought—from having read it a few times over the last twenty years. But it is utterly fresh! And comfortingly familiar at the same time. The central message that our native state is not separateness but unity—patience, love, compassion—is a powerful reminder. And of course Easwaran offers countless practical suggestions for bringing a little more of that unity into our work and relationships each day. Before long, I felt we were catching a glimpse of the world through the eyes of the mystics:

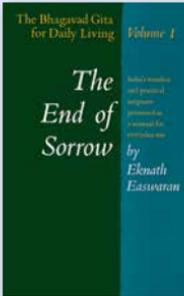
“When the distorting instrument of the mind is made clear, we see life not as a collection of fragments but as a seamless whole. We see the divine spark at the center of our very being; and we see simultaneously that in the heart of every other being... though hidden perhaps by clouds of ignorance and conditioning, that same spark is present, one and the same in all.”

IT Department: *Essence of the Upanishads*

I’ve loved this book ever since I first read it as *Dialogue with Death*. Easwaran always considered the Katha Upanishad on which this book is based as one of the most significant spiritual texts anywhere in the world. This book is packed with quintessential Easwaran, from the lofty to the practical. I’ve read this book several times and I’m always struck by its marvelous breadth, starting with the wonderful comparison of the body



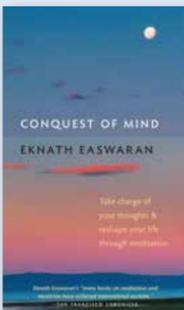
as chariot and the Self as the quiet all-seeing passenger, and ending with Yama's call to wake up and realize this Self with the aid of an illumined teacher. If I only had a choice of two or three books before I was dumped off on a desert island, this would definitely be one of them.



Programs Department: *The End of Sorrow*

I'm reading *The End of Sorrow*, which is the first volume in Easwaran's 3-part series *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*. Whenever I start reading it, I feel like I'm coming home. Easwaran's right there with me, sharing his daily examples of leading the spiritual life, and encouraging me to keep my eyes focused on the supreme goal of life even in the smallest undertaking. I love this quote on p.180:

"Everything matters on the spiritual path; it is little things, when put together, that amount to a great change. We may feel that we are small people, but working together, we are tremendous."



HR & Finance: *Conquest of Mind*

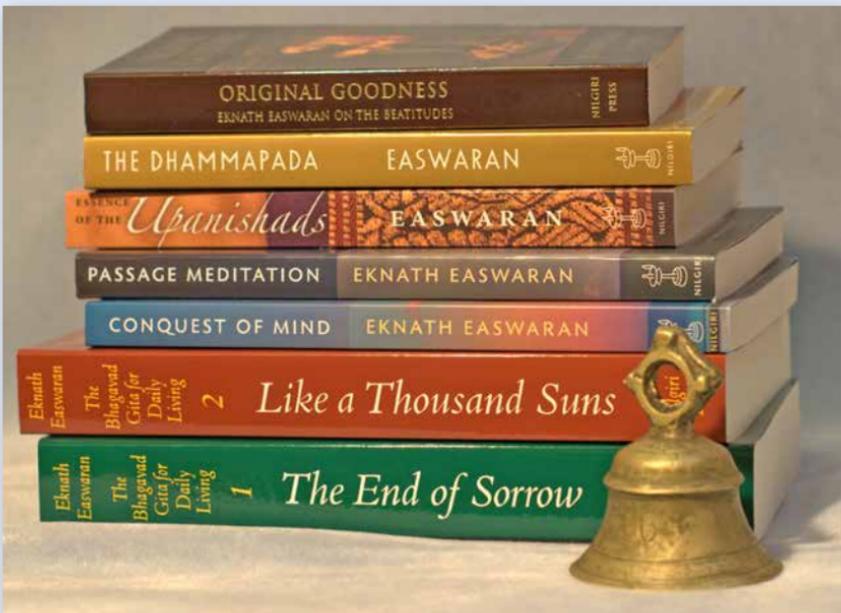
In *Conquest of Mind*, Easwaran presents the training of the mind as a sort of engineering problem: "Just as a carpenter uses a small peg to drive out a bigger one, you can use a right thought to drive out one that is wrong."

Easwaran illuminates this gem from the Buddha with strategies we can take to exchange "a negative thought for a positive one, an unkind thought for a kind one." He also illustrates some of the obstacles we might face and how to overcome them. All the while, he inspires us to practice

meditation which provides the true foundation for this lifelong “engineering” project.

“When you are meditating sincerely and systematically, every day brings you closer to your real Self, a little more at home in a world you can deal with. Even if there is a big gap between who you are and what you want to become, you have the tools in your hands and know how to use them. It brings hope, confidence, and the growing sense that you are equal to whatever the day may bring.”

After more than a decade of meditation, the feeling of “being equal to whatever the day may bring” is a state of mind I experience more regularly now. The “engineering” project I undertook in my own life, so many years ago, inspired by Easwaran’s writings in this book, has resulted in greater peace of mind and more energy and insights with which to help others.



9 | Take the passages deep

If a great book is the lifeblood of an author, a great prayer is the soul-force of a saint. Even a little passage like the Prayer of Saint Francis has this power, because it distills his life.

When I began this work of teaching meditation, I looked for a passage that would answer the needs not only of the West or the East but of the entire world. Through the grace of Francis of Assisi I was drawn to this prayer, which contains the practical secret of how Francis the troubadour became Francis the light of the West. For me, Saint Francis's grace is contained in that prayer.

Most of the passages in my little anthology *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* contain the grace of their author. If you are just enjoying them for their beauty, they have no connection with the will. Simply reading them may console us, it may inspire us, but it cannot bring about fundamental, lasting change. Meditation alone does that. If you take these passages deep, deep into consciousness, into that depth where the words open up their inner meaning and take you in, these words have power to change your life. Every great work of mystical literature then becomes a living channel between you and the saint or scripture from which it comes.

Spiritual growth is a lifelong dialogue between our everyday personality and our innermost Self, between the daily and the divine in the depths of the heart, when the superficial self we are aware of speaks to the deeper wisdom in us all.

In Judaism, parts of the holy scriptures and traditional liturgies contain the most sublime poetry for meditation:

Evening Prayer for the Sabbath

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 Christian tradition has brought forth many great saints who have left accounts of their growth in consciousness. One who appeals to me deeply is Saint Teresa of Avila, whose three books—the *Autobiography*, *The Way of Perfection*, and *The Interior Castle*—chronicle nearly twenty years of spiritual apprenticeship. Teresa also left a few short poems, stamped with her own experience, which make inspiring passages for meditation. They show her simplicity and her capacity to penetrate straight to the essence:

Let Nothing Upset You

Saint Teresa of Avila

Let nothing upset you;
Let nothing frighten you.
Everything is changing;
God alone is changeless.
Patience attains the goal.
Who has God lacks nothing:
God alone fills every need.

For centuries too the mystics of Islam – Ansari of Herat, Jalaluddin Rumi, Fariduddin Attar, Rabi'a, Mahmud Shabestari, Sheikh Abu Sa'id – have been praising the Lord in magnificent language:

If You Want to Draw Near to God

Abu Sa'id

If you want to draw near to God,
seek him in the hearts of those around you.

Speak well of all, present or absent.

If you would be a light for others,
be like the sun: show the same face to all.

To bring joy to a single heart is better
than building countless shrines for worship;
to capture one heart through kindness
is better than setting a thousand free.

This is the true lover of God,
who lives with others,
rises and eats and sleeps like others,
gives and takes with others in the bazaar,
yet never forgets God even for a moment.

Buddhism has a venerable tradition of mystical writings; above all, I would recommend the Dhammapada. Its twenty-six chapters distill the essence of the Buddha's teachings and bear the stamp of his personal experience. The Buddha was a spiritual scientist with a penetrating intellect, relentlessly logical in his pursuit of truth. Using homely images that the villagers of ancient India could easily grasp—no less vivid for us today—he presents the human condition as incisively as an experienced physician. The diagnosis: raging desire, possibly terminal. The antidote: nirvana, the extinction of all selfishness. The prognosis: hopeful, excellent. And last, as we would expect from a good doctor, a strong but invigorating medicine to ensure recovery: the Noble Eightfold Path, based on the practice of meditation.

The Blessing of a Well-Trained Mind

From the Dhammapada of the Buddha

Hard it is to train the mind, which goes where it likes and does what it wants. But a trained mind brings health and happiness.

The wise can direct their thoughts, subtle and elusive, wherever they choose: a trained mind brings health and happiness.

They are not wise whose thoughts are not steady and minds not serene, who do not know dharma, the law of life. They are wise whose thoughts are steady and minds serene, unaffected by good and bad. They are awake and free from fear.

More than those who hate you, more than all your enemies, an untrained mind does greater harm. More than your mother, more than your father, more than all your family, a well-trained mind does greater good.

Hinduism embraces a vast and diverse collection of scriptures and mystical writings, some of them going back many thousand years. The Upanishads, the oldest of these, are among the most profound of all spiritual documents. Over one hundred Upanishads have come down to us, and of these, ten or so are generally regarded as the principal ones. I have translated these and a few others in *The Upanishads*, part of my Classics of Indian Spirituality series; they make ideal passages for use in meditation.

Of all the books from any spiritual tradition, however, none has meant more to me than the Bhagavad Gita. If I may borrow Gandhi's words, "It became my dictionary of daily reference. Just as I turned to the English dictionary for the meanings of English words that I did not understand, I turned to this dictionary of conduct for a ready solution of all my troubles and trials." To make the Gita more accessible to modern readers, I have offered my own translation and practical commentary in *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, drawing on personal experience to show how the precepts of the Gita can be put to work in our own lives.

The eighteen chapters of the Gita pursue a dialogue between the young prince Arjuna, who stands for you and me, and the Lord himself, in the form of Sri Krishna. Arjuna has many questions, many reservations, many doubts; his divine teacher patiently sets them to rest.

Once you turn inward, the words of inspired passages like these urge us forward in response to a summons from the very depths of the heart.

This need to return to the source of our being is nothing less than an evolutionary imperative—the

Still Your Mind in Me

From the Bhagavad Gita

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.

drive to realize our full human potential. As Meister Eckhart says, “Whether you like it or not, whether you know it or not, secretly Nature seeks and hunts and tries to ferret out the track in which God may be found.” Something deep within us must find expression beyond the plane of pleasure and profit; that is our glory as human beings.



Ramagiri Ashram residents.

10 | Draw closer to your teacher

I have said many times that Saint Francis lives in the words of his prayer. Gandhi may be said to live in the second chapter of the Gita, on which he based his life. Similarly, you can say that I live in my eight-point program, and I can assure you that I live in my audio and video recordings for those who are practicing my method of meditation to the best of their ability and following the instructions faithfully with an open heart.

You have to remember that when I started to meditate, my own spiritual teacher, my grandmother, had already passed away. At first I felt very much on my own, but at every stage, when I turned to her for guidance, I found answers to my questions.

In spite of our best efforts, however, there will be times in meditation when we find ourselves in a difficult predicament—times when the senses defy us, when self-will goes on a rampage. Then it is that an experienced, skillful spiritual teacher can come to our rescue.

Once, on a drive in the country, my wife and I somehow managed to back our car into a particularly awkward position with the axle over a rock, so that we could neither go forward nor backward. Three strong young fellows who happened to be walking by stopped and tried to help, but they only succeeded in getting the car more completely wedged in. Finally a friend called a nearby service station to bring a tow truck, and in less than fifteen minutes we were able to drive away.

That is the kind of service a spiritual teacher performs. A good spiritual teacher is like a tow

truck driver who is on call twenty-four hours a day, and one of the hooks in his vast assortment is just the right size for us. When we get ourselves stuck in meditation and find we can't go forward or back, he pulls us forward just enough to get us free. Then, the moment we can move again, he removes the tow chain and lets us go forward again on our own.

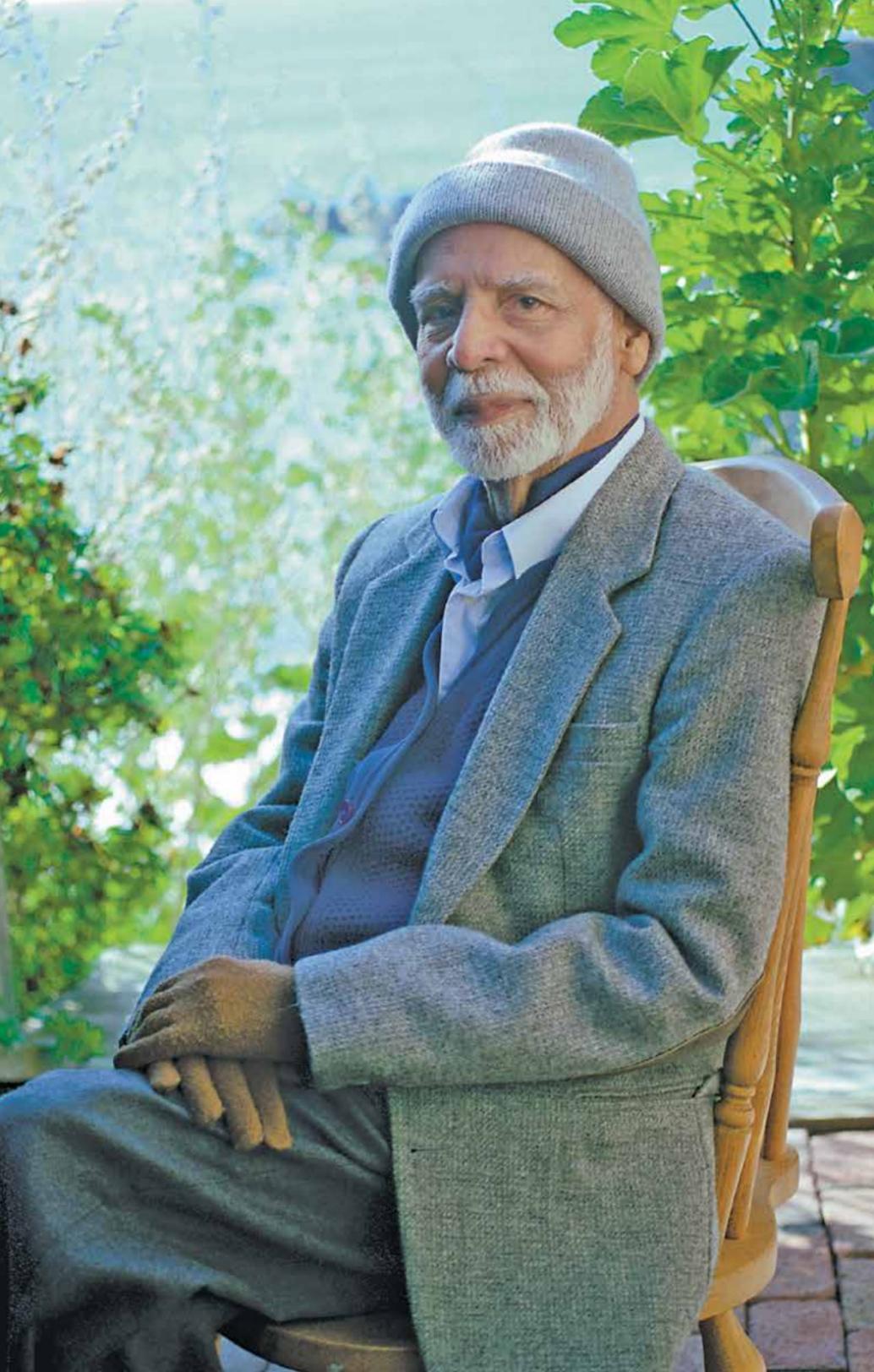
If you are prepared to undertake the long journey, the teacher will give you the map and all necessary instructions, but you have got to do the traveling yourself. That the teacher cannot provide. The purpose of visiting a spiritual teacher is to be reminded that there is a destination, there is a supreme goal in life, and we all have the innate capacity to undertake the journey.

It is good for us to remember that the guru, the spiritual teacher, is in every one of us. All that another person can do is to make us aware of the teacher within ourselves. The outer teacher makes us aware of the teacher within, and to the extent we can be loyal to the outer teacher, we are being loyal to ourselves, to our Atman.

When people used to sit in the presence of Sri Ramana Maharshi and praise him, he would just smile as if to say, "There is no Sri Ramana Maharshi. I am just a little keyhole through which, when you fix your eye with complete concentration, you can see the beckoning, irresistible vision of the Lord."

Easwaran outside his cottage, Ramagiri Ashram, Spring 1970.





At Home Wherever You Go

When you know the Self, the Upanishads say, everything in life is known, because it is this Self that is the essence of all things. To realize the Self is to love all creatures—in fact, to become love itself.

How are we to make this supreme discovery? Saint Thomas Aquinas tells us in a famous passage: “Three things are necessary for salvation: one, to know what we ought to believe; two, to know what we ought to desire; and three, to know what we ought to do.”

The scriptures and mystics of all religions concur on what to believe: that the core of our personality is divine, and that the purpose of life is to discover this divinity for ourselves. What to desire, then, is the Lord himself, which is why mastery of desire has been called the key to Self-realization. Meditation enables us to withdraw our desires from frustrating, foolish channels and redirect them toward the Lord in an overwhelming, overriding flood of longing to be united with him forever.

When this is understood, the third requirement—what we ought to do in life—becomes clear. Deep in our heart is the awareness that anything less than Self-realization will leave the human being unfulfilled.

So please read the instructions on meditation again and again and follow them very carefully. That’s the most important thing anyone can do. As compulsive desires fall away, you will find you have such security, such energy, such love and respect for everybody, that instead of feeling empty you will feel fulfilled; instead of feeling lonely, you will feel at home wherever you go.

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"I really love this format. Since it's not possible for all of us to be physically together, this is the next best thing. This is a fine example of the 'right' approach to technology—something that as we know can make people feel more isolated, even though they're 'connected' by social media, etc. And if you can hold my attention with the wind howling (we are in the middle of a blizzard) you must be doing something right!"—*A webinar participant*

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such security, such energy,
such love and respect for
everybody, that instead
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