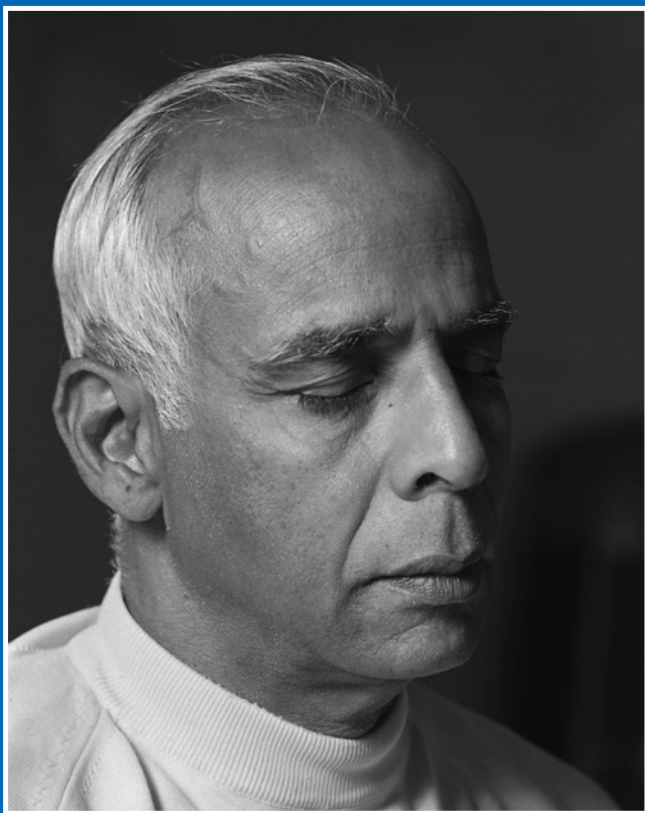


Eknath Easwaran on Meditation & Spiritual Living

Blue Mountain Journal

FALL 2025



Meditation on a Passage:

We Become What We Meditate On

In this Issue

Easwaran begins this issue with a reminder of the goal of life and then turns to some key principles of his method of passage meditation. “First, it is training in concentration,” he writes. “Second, we begin to resemble and actually become whatever we give our attention to.”

Easwaran tells us that this isn’t easy. We have to learn “to forget our private needs when necessary, so that we can gradually expand our consciousness until it includes the whole of life.” He describes the stages of meditation, and how “slowly, gradually, you learn to descend into the unconscious and come up again step by step.”

An article by Christine Easwaran on Easwaran’s method of passage meditation quotes him saying, “Slow, sustained concentration on these words drives them deep into consciousness. There they take root and begin to create wonderful changes in our lives.”

Our readers share how this is happening to them and how meditation on a varied repertoire of passages gives increasing motivation and inspiration for spiritual practice.

May this issue help us all to deepen our meditation and become what we meditate on.

— The BMCM Editorial Team

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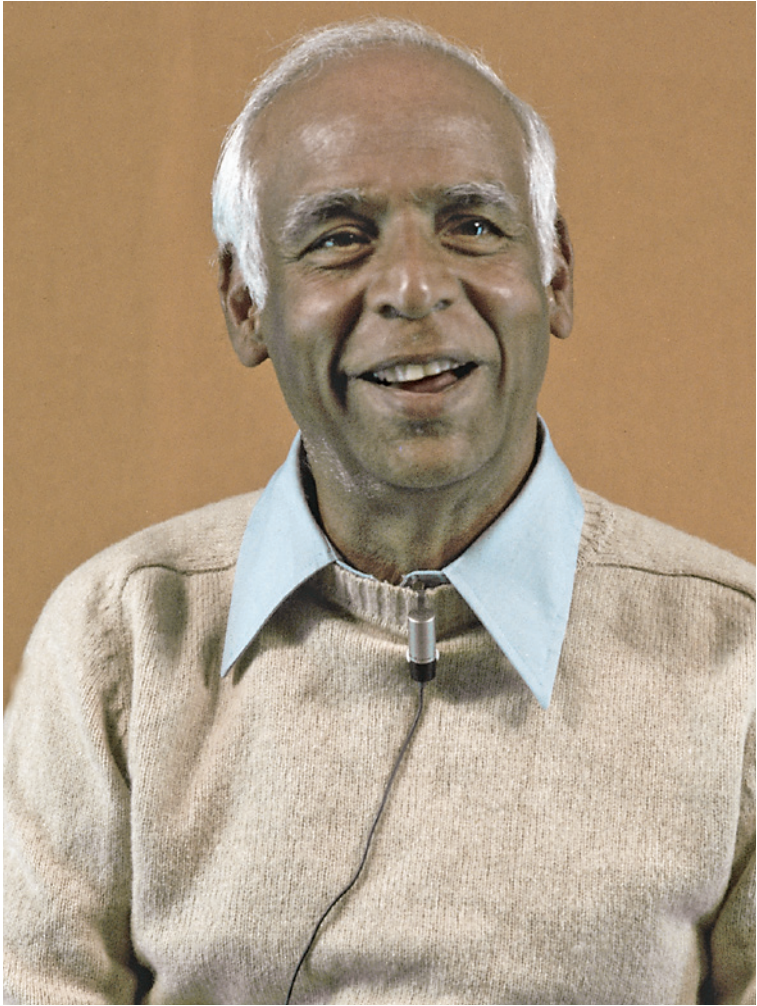
The Key to the Art of Living

Ekknath Easwaran, from *Words to Live By*

The method of meditation I teach involves sitting quietly with eyes closed and going slowly, in the mind, through the words of an inspirational passage that appeals to you deeply. It may be a prayer, or a poem from one of the great mystics, or a piece of scripture from any of the world's religions. It must be a very positive selection. When you sit quietly like this every morning, concentrating completely on words that embody your highest ideals, you are giving your mind thoughts of the purest quality to work with during the day. These selfless thoughts begin to mold your life. Joy begins to follow you throughout the day.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Ekknath Easwaran". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial 'E'.



Eknath Easwaran, 1970s

The Goal of Life

Eknath Easwaran, from *Climbing the Blue Mountain*

In the seventh century, the Venerable Bede tells us, an Anglo-Saxon king by the name of Edwin was approached by emissaries from Rome to persuade him to embrace the Christian faith. Edwin took counsel with one of his most trusted subjects, and the reply he received will probably be remembered when the rest of Bede's history has been forgotten.

It must have been a winter evening, with the bitter cold of a Northumbrian blizzard blowing outside the stone hall where the king and his court warmed themselves about the fire. "Sir," Edwin's counselor replied, "it has often seemed to me that our lives here on earth are like the passage of a little swallow that darts in from the darkness into the cheerful warmth of our banquet hall here, lingers a moment, and then passes again out of the window into the cold and wintry night. We know nothing of where it comes from or where it goes; we see only the brief moments in which its flight is illumined by the fire's flickering light.

"My life too is like this. I do not know where I have come from, why I am here, or where if anywhere I will be after death. If your new religion can throw some light into this darkness that extends before birth and after death, it seems to me most worthy of being followed." In all religions, in all countries, thoughtful men and women have been troubled by these questions more than by any other. *For what purpose am I here? Where am I going? What awaits me after death?* Without

answers to these questions, life has very little meaning. We may amass a lot of money, but at the hour of death our fortunes will throw no light into that darkness. We may have enjoyed a good deal of pleasure, but even before we get up to leave the banquet hall, pleasure and its memories will tell us apologetically, “Sorry, old man. We can’t follow you there.”

With death waiting, we would expect everyone’s driving desire to be to find answers to these questions come what may. Everything else would naturally take second priority. Yet when I look around, I sometimes think most of us keep so busy all the time simply because we do not want even to hear such questions asked. It is a sure measure of the Lord’s love that whether or not we want to think about it, he will find ways to go on asking until finally we do hear. Many of the tragedies and reversals of life are special delivery letters sent straight from the Lord to our door, reminding us that other activities will bring us very little satisfaction until we discover why we are here.

The Hound of Heaven

In a poem called “The Hound of Heaven,” the English poet Francis Thompson describes the Lord as a bloodhound, on the trail of every one of us. If you have read *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, you will see how vivid the image is:

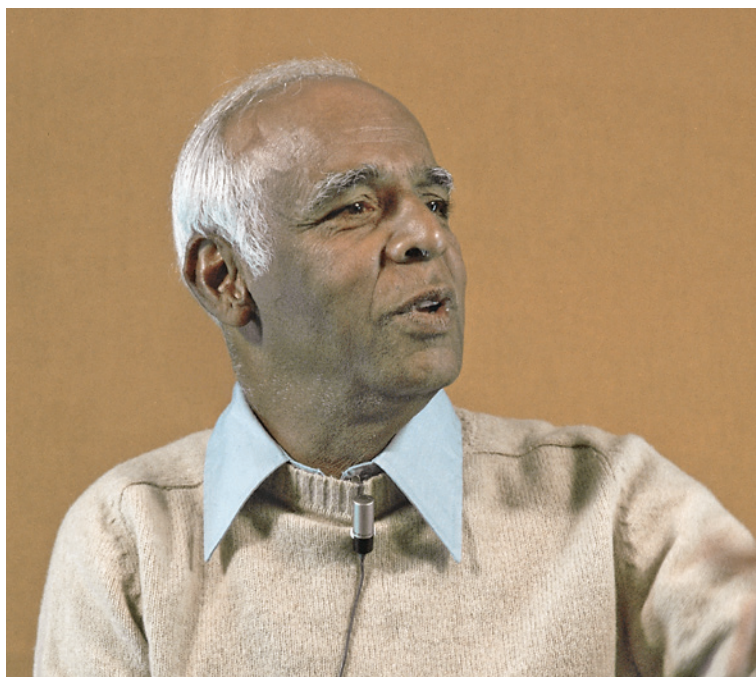
I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

...

Still with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
Came on the following Feet,
And a Voice above their beat –
“Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me.”

If this sounds fanciful to our scientific ears, let me give an illustration. A friend of mine, Brian, had two great passions before he took to meditation. One was music in any mode or form; the other, a restless desire to set foot on every place on this planet at least once. But the Hound of Heaven was on Brian’s trail. He picks up the scent of Brian’s music *samskara* and his nose quivers; he knows that Brian is ready to be tracked down. Unfortunately, Brian is not ready to be caught. He doesn’t even want to see this Hound. So he ducks into the first pleasure-pub he sees, where Nashville Norm is playing the blues. Brian thinks he is there because he likes country music. Actually what he finds so satisfying is being free from that Hound.

Finally, after Norm has gone through his whole repertoire and the proprietor is turning the chairs upside down on the table tops, Brian peeks out the door, certain that the Hound has given up and gone away. He starts walking down the street, but there is a panting somewhere in the dark behind him. Again he leaps into the nearest night club, which happens to be holding a flamenco festival. “Flamenco!” he says. “Just what I’ve been looking for!” And for a while, until the fascination of flamenco fades, the Hound is forgotten again. Brian is absorbed in learning new modes and rhythms; perhaps he even meets a dark-eyed lady whose singing is as exotic as her name. That is



Eknath Easwaran, 1970s

enough to drown out for a while the insistent call within him.

In other words, the music is really irrelevant. If it is not folk music it will be flamenco; if it is not flamenco it will be fugues. The underlying purpose in all these pursuits is to enable Brian to escape this nagging Hound.

But finally Brian grows tired – tired of pubs, tired of music, tired of running away. He gives up hiding. Then, Thompson says, the Hound has got him. “Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me”: in running away from God, we run away from life. Brian settles down, learns to meditate, and turns all his desires inwards to discover what life is really for.

The vast spiral movement of evolution

Without a sublime, central, overriding purpose to bring all life together, pursuits like accumulating money and enjoying pleasure have no meaning, because life itself has no meaning until its purpose is discovered and fulfilled. According to the Hindu scriptures, all creation moves toward this supreme purpose through the vast spiral movement of evolution. Even if it takes millions of years, they assure us, all of us will eventually attain the goal of life. In the language of orthodox religion, all of us will eventually return to God, who is our real home.

Here the mystics pose a persuasive question: Why wait for all those millions of years to pass? Why go through the travail of lifetimes' worth of heartbreak and deprivation if you can somehow avoid it? Why not take evolution into your own hands, and turn inwards to discover the source of meaning and fulfillment right within yourself?

No longer a separate fragment of life

The Upanishads give a vivid account of this momentous decision. Our senses, they say, have been made to turn outwards. As long as we rely only on our senses, we can only look the wrong way: out. But at last, the scriptures say, some unknown seeker in ancient times – someone who had seen through the games the external world has to offer – sat down in meditation and turned all his attention inward like a laser. In the radiant light of *samadhi*, the climax of meditation, he saw his real Self enshrined in joy in the very depths of his own consciousness.

Simultaneously, when he opens his eyes, he sees the same Self in all the people he meets. No longer is he a separate

fragment of life. All the barriers between him and others are gone; after that experience he lives in everyone, and everyone lives in him. Not only that, he lives for everyone. He finds fulfillment not in what he can get for himself, but in what he contributes to the welfare of all life.

Another dimension to life

Because our senses are so utterly oriented outward, we may doubt the existence of this Self. I have even heard people claim that mysticism denies the physical world. A good mystic would answer, “We are not belittling Sir Isaac Newton. We don’t deny the Pythagorean Theorem. All we are saying is that we have discovered another dimension to life, another realm – changeless, eternal, beyond cause and effect – on which the entire physical universe rests.” As Spinoza, the great European philosopher, puts it, “The finite rests on the bosom of the Infinite.” In all religions, great mystics will say just what Sri Ramakrishna used to say: “Of course you can see God! He is Reality itself. I see Him right now, right here, in everyone, all the time.”

I have been telling people about this Self almost daily for more than thirty years, but occasionally I am still asked, “Are you talking about something outside us?” Compared with this Self – whom we call Krishna or Christ, Allah or Adonai or the Divine Mother – my own body is “outside.” Compared with the Self, my own life is not more dear. Yet this Self is one and the same in all.

I can illustrate this with a simile borrowed from Shankara, a great mystic of medieval India – adapted, of course, to suit our own century and place. On a moonlit night in Los Angeles, if you look at all the swimming pools – there must be almost a million

of them – you will find a moon in every pool. Just as each of those million pool owners says, “This is *my* swimming pool,” he or she will say, “This is *my* moon. I’ve got a swimming pool with moon.” Gradually they all come to believe that it really is their moon – theirs and nobody else’s.

Shankara just smiles. “As long as you are looking down,” he says, “it is your moon – a million separate moons. But if you lift up your eyes you will see there is only one real moon, lovely and flaxen, reflected in all these pools.”

We have been looking down at our feet throughout evolution; we have forgotten that it is also possible to look up. We have grown used to hanging our heads. When our spiritual teacher encourages us to look upward, we say, “We can’t. We’re in the habit of focusing our attention on our toes.” Our teacher lovingly tries to lift our chins, gives our necks a gentle massage, and over a period of time through his example he shows us how to lift up our eyes. And finally we learn. “Oh! *There’s* the moon! There is only one, shining in a whole sky – the same moon for all of us, reflected in every swimming pool in L.A.”

We see life whole

This is the tremendous vision that comes in samadhi. Afterwards we know from direct experience that there is only one Self. When we see Africans we know they are all us, only wearing different-colored jackets. When we see children playing in the park in Peking, we exclaim, “Those are *our* children, only they’re giggling in Chinese!” It is impossible to separate even the needs of one country from those of another, our outlook has become so universal. Everywhere we see life whole.

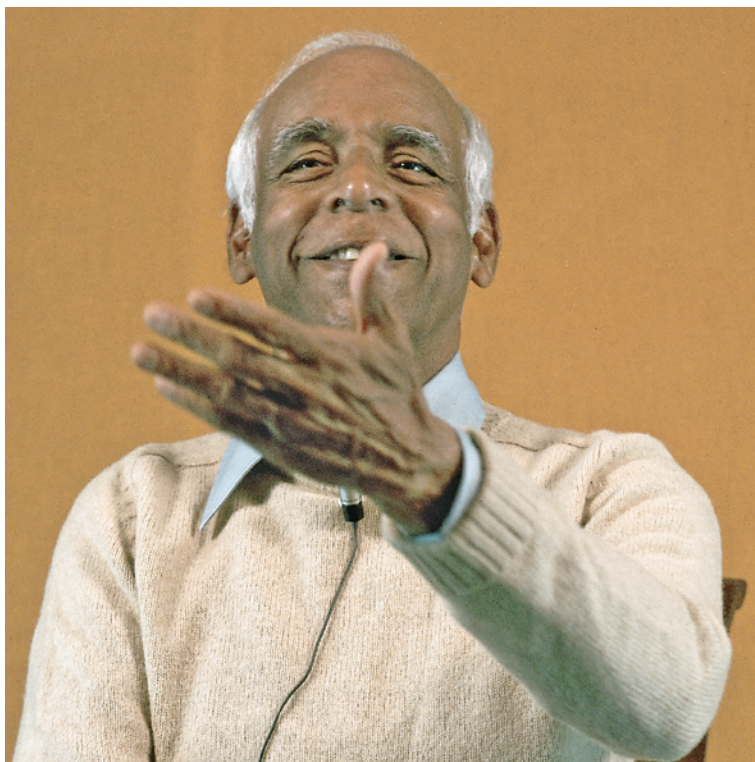
This is not merely the opinion of mystics. Though realizing the unity of life is much more than a merely intellectual discovery, great scientists too have expressed the same idea. Here is Albert Einstein:

A human being is part of the whole, called by us “universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Where war is concerned, for example, it does not take a mystic to see that this narrow idea of national interest which we cling to so dangerously today – “your welfare is either allied with ours or against ours” – is nothing but an “optical delusion.” When we regain our sight we see clearly that every country is ours; all people on earth are our own.

Meaning and purpose

Similarly, all creatures are our kith and kin. One of the reasons I enjoy walking on the beach so much is that I see so many of my fellow creatures at close quarters: pelicans, sea gulls, sandpipers, and a sea lion who has become so used to our visits that he waits near shore just to wave his flipper at us. I see him almost every day. They can be so human! Today I saw two sandpipers having a thoroughly modern confrontation, eyeball to eyeball. One poor



Eknath Easwaran, 1970s

fellow became so angry that his feathers all stood up. I could imagine what he would have been shrieking if he were human; it made me glad I do not understand sandpiperese. He was pacing up and down on the sand with such fury that I wanted to give him a mantram; it would have quieted him considerably.

For those who realize their oneness with all creation, each moment is imbued with meaning and purpose. Every morning a mystic like Sri Ramakrishna or Teresa of Avila gets up with a different question than most of the rest of the world. We ask,

“How big a check can I bring home today? Which pleasure can I manage to work into my schedule? On whom can I vent my wrath?” The mystic asks simply, “How much can I give today and to how many?” This one question reverses our perspective completely. Such a person may look like everyone else, but inwardly he or she embraces the whole of life.

Extending a loving arm to society

I sometimes hear that the spiritual life means leaving society behind. By no means! The spiritual life means extending a loving arm to society and helping it to go forward. It means contributing in whatever field we can – as teachers, plumbers, nurses, parents – not to gain attention or a fat bank account, but for the sheer joy of giving.

I must have heard many times the same tired objection: “Yes, yes, we appreciate this motive, but you have to take into account the vagaries of human nature. Without profit and pleasure, there is no motivation.” This does great injustice to human nature, for it takes it at its lowest level. Human beings give their highest out of love.

This is the challenge that the mystics of all religions hold up to us. It is a challenge meant for heroes and heroines. When all is said and done, making money is not much of a challenge. Enjoying pleasure requires no special talent. But to take our evolution into our own hands, *that* is a real challenge. We have to learn to do something that the conquerors of the external world usually find impossible: to forget our private needs when necessary, so that we can gradually expand our consciousness until it includes the whole of life.

Nothing of value has been lost

This is never an easy process. Sometimes it is exasperating, even painful. For a while, we may feel we are losing everything – missing out on personal pleasures, falling short of joy. It takes time to realize that nothing of value has been lost; nothing is taken away. Francis Thompson puts it beautifully at the end of his poem, when the Hound of Heaven says after tracking him down at last:

All which I took from thee I did but take
Not for thy harms,
But that thou might'st seek it in My arms.
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost,
I have stored for thee at home.





Eknath Easwaran, 1980s

The Inner Journey

Ekknath Easwaran, from *Essence of the Dhammapada*

Because it is so central to all spiritual practice, let me take a few moments here to review some basic principles regarding meditation.

One, meditation is a discipline. It is not letting the mind wander. Second, meditation is not divorced from life; it yields rich dividends: on the physical level, the emotional level, the intellectual level, and of course on the spiritual level. You don't have to leave home to learn to meditate; you can be married or you can be single; you can hold any job that is not at the expense of life. You can wear a three-piece suit or well-worn jeans. There is no need to shave your head or grow a beard. None of this has anything to do with the spiritual life and meditation.

Third, it is good to remember that all of us begin meditation against heavy odds. We have allowed our mind to run wild for a long, long time, so we shouldn't get impatient to discover that we cannot keep the mind under control even for a few moments. Training the mind through meditation cannot be achieved quickly or through violent means. Complete sovereignty over the mind can be achieved only little by little, day by day, step by step. Don't get impatient, and don't get angry with the mind. That is just what the mind wants! Infinite patience and intelligent practice are required for steady progress. Right from the early days, therefore, on the one hand, we should be patient – and not only in the early days, but for years and years. And on

the other hand, we should always be persistent and vigilant. We need to keep on trying with a kind of patient impatience, which is quite a difficult skill to learn.

Respect the mind

My advice for those who are beginning the practice of meditation is always to respect the mind. Respect your mind and the mind will respect you. Don't think that the mind is slow-witted. I assure you, the mind is a clever customer with quite a few cards up its sleeve. Unless you are prepared to use artistry and skill, the clever mind will win the hand time after time. Always treat the mind as a friend, not an adversary, and eventually it will come to have such respect for you that it no longer tries to play tricks on you.

In meditation, the mind has to be coaxed and cajoled. Sometimes it must be rewarded and at other times gently reasoned with. The mind is very much like a little child – not wicked but willful, always ready to say no. I've always found it astonishing how early children start saying no. Even a little fellow hardly out of his cradle is screaming *no, no, no, no* at the top of his lungs. The mind is just like that. When you are angry and try to coax your mind, "Don't be angry, be sympathetic," the mind will just cry, "No, no, no, no!" When you're afraid, try telling your mind not to be afraid. The mind says, "Waaa! I cannot help being afraid!" – which is another way of saying no.

My suggestion is to meditate at the same time every morning. To meditate one day at six-thirty, another day at seven-thirty,

and the next day at eight-thirty will get you nowhere. You may say you have met the requirement, and that is true; you have. But the mind is laughing at you. There is no regularity, there is no discipline, which is just what the mind appreciates. If you can keep a fixed period for meditation, the mind will gradually learn that at that time at least it will have a temporary abdication. It is quite sure that it is going to have a re-coronation soon, but at least for that meditation period you can pretend that you are master in your own home, and that the mind is a transient who has moved in against your better judgment.

A habit for your mind to quiet down

Gradually you will find that you don't need an alarm clock to wake up at the right time for meditation. You will get up at the same time because that has become a habit, just as it will become a habit for your mind to quiet down at that time. And you will enjoy getting up early because that is the best time for meditation: as night turns to day, the mind quiets down naturally.

Most spiritual teachers tell us that it is a great help if we can meditate together with a few others. If you are a bit late, there is always somebody to say afterwards, "You came rather late, didn't you?" Or if you miss your meditation one morning, somebody will say, "We missed you. Where did you go? L.A.?" These awkward questions are usually motivated by a sincere concern, and when we know others care about our meditation we have a valuable reason to sustain our efforts. Even when we don't feel equal to meditation, why not just go for meditation and shield ourselves from Paul Pry?

Potent resources are slowly being released

In meditation we are actually playing with the mind, which in some ways is like handling a powerful explosive. Whenever we sink below the surface level of consciousness, potent resources are slowly being released into our lives. These resources must be used; they must be harnessed. As you meditate more deeply, you should work more – on the physical level, the intellectual level, the creative level – without thought of profit or pleasure. When the energy released in meditation is channeled into selfless service, we will proceed safely and swiftly on the spiritual path.

It is essential to have physical exercise appropriate for our state of health, and work that benefits others, what the Buddha calls Right Occupation. We need to turn outwards in work and in affectionate human relationships, because one of the serious dangers of deepening meditation is the longing to take shelter inside. Inside, everything feels so warm, while the world outside can seem so cold. Outside, people look so frigid, events look so unappealing; inside there is such warmth and shelter that you feel you could stay and sit forever by the fire. It is good to spend time with people even if they – or we – are not always agreeable; that is how we restore the mind to health.

The test of meditation

The method of meditation I have used for many decades involves sitting quietly with eyes closed and going slowly, in the mind, through the words of an inspirational passage that appeals to me deeply. It might be a prayer, or a poem from one of the great mystics, or a piece of scripture from any of the world's religions, for example, the first chapter of the Dhammapada. When



Eknath Easwaran, 1980s

I sit in meditation, I go through the words of the Buddha's verses slowly, with deep concentration, letting every precious word sink deeply into my awareness. Now, after long practice, the words of the inspirational passage have permeated my consciousness. That is the test of meditation – not heavenly sounds and visions, but how we respond in daily relations at home, at work, and even on the bus with fellow passengers. I have been meditating for decades, but even now I still catch myself saying, "There is nothing like meditation!"

Now that the basics of training the mind are out of the way, let me change the metaphor and describe the mind as the terrain of the journey itself. With that change in perspective, we can see that the entire journey to nirvana is an excursion into the world of the mind.

Travel into the depths of consciousness

As always, it is easier to understand this through a story. This one is about what took place when the Buddha sat under the bodhi tree and proclaimed the words that echo in the heart of every true spiritual aspirant everywhere: “Come what may, let my bones melt away, let my blood dry up, I will not get up until I have entered nirvana!”

Sitting in meditation with head, neck, and spine in a straight line, holding his body motionless and his mind at rest, he spoke these words with such absolute authority that the sutras say the bodhi tree burst into blossom and covered him with flowers. After countless lifetimes, he knew the time had come for his plunge into nirvana. But first he had to travel into the depths of consciousness and confront Mara [the personification of death and selfish passion] once and for all.

That night, Mara brought all his forces to the attack — first his daughters, voluptuous forms representing pleasure, who began their seductive dance fully expecting Siddhartha to succumb to all the old blandishments, forget his spiritual destiny, and fall back into the arms of the world.

To their surprise, the Buddha was not tempted, and Mara’s daughters retreated in despair. Now it was time for the mob of Mara’s henchmen to attack, offering power beyond the dreams

of the worst tyrant and prestige and wealth beyond all worldly aspiration. When these offers of wealth and power were refused, they did not go away quietly but turned into demonic shapes with fearful weapons to continue the attack.

Amazingly contemporary

The description of Mara in the Buddhist scriptures is amazingly contemporary. He tempts with sex, tempts with power, strikes through every human weakness. Today, twenty-five hundred years later, Mara still tempts in all the old ways and perhaps in a few newer ones, such as drugs and the powerful media. It is not an exaggeration to say that some of the movies today look as if they were produced and directed by Mara. Mara's cohorts are there on the screen, and his daughters make their appearance as well. Today we are still under the age-old spell of Mara because even now we are utterly identified with our physical existence. You might say that Mara is a very important person in today's world, a celebrity who travels in a long motorcade with powerful forces at his command.

But Mara can also be charming. When his armies failed to shake Siddhartha's resolve, Mara appeared in his most reasonable and urbane form. He played his first card, saying, "You don't know what is in store for you in nirvana. Don't try to cross into that unknown world. It is better to stay on this level of consciousness, where you at least know what to expect."

The Buddha sits quietly, not shaken at all. "Go on, Mara, reveal yourself, shoot your arrows. I am not afraid of you."

Mara is conquered for now – though he'll be back – and the Buddha begins his journey into the depths of consciousness.



Eknath Easwaran, 1980s

The stages of this journey

Fortunately, the Buddha himself describes the stages of this journey, passing through what I would call the personal unconscious into the collective unconscious and plumbing its depths until he reached nirvana. Giving a rough outline, the Buddhist sutras describe the journey as taking place in stages, which can be helpful in understanding our own journey in meditation.

First, we all begin on the surface level of consciousness, which is the normal waking state. The Buddha would regard

this as a rather low level of awareness because here we don't have access to any of our deeper resources. This is essentially a physical level. Mighty things can be accomplished in the physical world, and there is no reason to belittle these accomplishments, which have made life more comfortable and brought us great technological achievements. But modern civilization thinks this is the only state of consciousness, and that is where tragedy strikes because so much more of what a human being can draw on lies in the depths below.

The personal unconscious

Just below the surface of consciousness we enter the first stage of meditation, which is characterized by distractions. Even the Buddha had to pass through this stage to go deeper, so none of us need be embarrassed if we sit down to meditate and find we have distractions about the work we will be doing later in the day and the problems that are on our hands. It takes a certain amount of time to pack everything away and draw a little curtain so that these distractions can be left behind. When we come out of meditation, we can pick them all up again so that we can face the challenges of the day. This stage is essentially a clearance of luggage, putting things away, establishing some order.

Deeper in the personal unconscious, once we gain the capacity to put distractions aside, we find that countless things impede our progress. Everywhere there are red lights: likes and dislikes, sensory cravings, personal attachments. We wait for the lights to turn green . . . and wait, and wait, but they don't change. "All right," we say at first, "I'll wait. The light has to

change sometime.” But time passes, the light is still red, and we start to get frustrated, “Let the light turn green!” Then one day we get a yellow light. When you see the yellow light, make a dash for it! Only for people like the Buddha does the light turn green. At these depths in the personal unconscious everything gets much more subtle. Sometimes you can’t see the obstacle; you can’t get hold of the impediments at all. Progress gets more sticky because the challenges are more subtle.

Dive below the surface level

Challenges on the surface level are obvious, because they are mostly physical. If you don’t want to eat candy, for example, nobody is going to put candy into your mouth. It requires some effort to resist a temptation like this, but the temptation is clear, and everybody is capable of dealing with physical temptations. Once you dive below the surface level, however, you find a very strange world. In changing levels of consciousness like this, one recurrent difficulty is the problem of sleep. At each new level we are like a child learning to walk. We know how to walk on the surface level of the mind, but we don’t know how to walk in the dark realms of the unconscious, so the easiest thing for the mind to do is to black out. This is simply the mind saying, “I don’t know how to walk here, so I’m going to fall asleep.”

This image of falling is an apt one, because all kinds of vague fears come up when we are about to change levels in meditation. We can’t name those fears or face them, so we just go to sleep. Again, this is just the mind saying, “I don’t want to have anything to do with this!”

Changing from one level of consciousness to another

When you are changing from one level of consciousness to another, you find that your will has been left behind; that is why you slumber. It can be depressing: every time you sit down to meditate, you fall asleep. The brighter side is that you are no longer on the surface level. The will hasn't kept up, so you have to say to it, "Come along!"

There are two ways to tackle the problem, and both are needed. First, you can begin to look for opportunities during the day when you can strengthen the will. Second, when you find yourself getting drowsy in meditation, draw yourself away from your back support, sit up straight, and fight the wave of sleep. You'll find that simply straightening the spinal column has a beneficial effect on concentration. But even when you do everything in your power to sit up straighter and stay awake, you may not be able to; that's what lack of will means. And even if you do stay awake, after a while the wave of sleep will come over you again, and the same story will repeat itself. This can go on for a long time.

A real effort of will

These are likely to be unwelcome suggestions, because when you are on the verge of sleep in meditation, the feeling is one of delicious relaxation. At that time the expression on your face is blissful. All is right in the world, God is in his heaven, and here I am asleep. You look so happy, so contented. "Isn't this great!" I don't like being a wet blanket, but I must tell you that in order to wake up on a deeper level of consciousness, this is the time

to make a real effort of will, draw yourself up, and stick it out with all the doggedness you can muster.

Give or take a few weaknesses, our willpower may function fairly well on the level of waking life, but below the conscious level the will just doesn't operate. That is why learning to walk there is so difficult. It is by meditating regularly day in and day out, week in and week out, year in and year out, that we learn to operate in these subterranean areas.

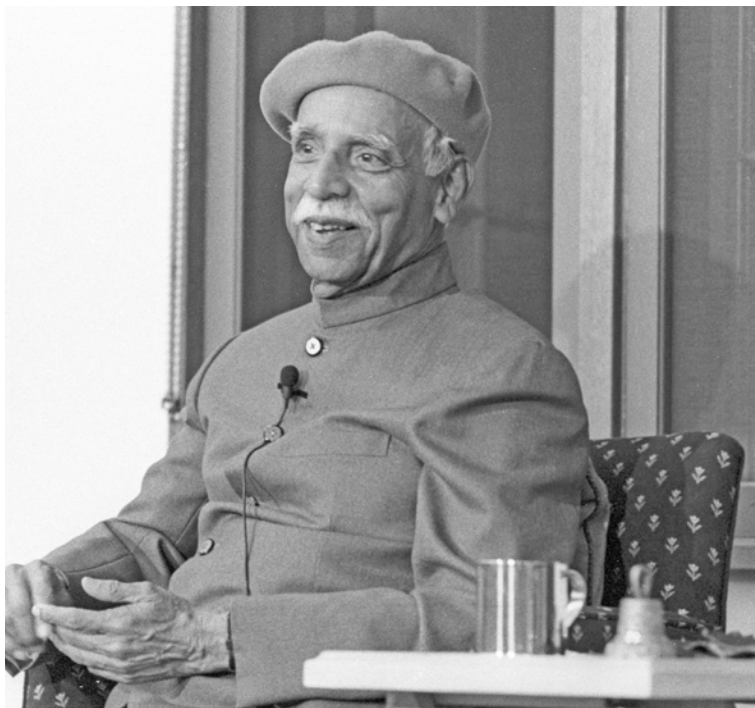
This problem is not always what we usually call sleep. At a certain depth in meditation we are neither awake nor asleep, neither in the world within nor the world outside. This state is called "the sleep of yoga," and it descends like a blanket.

A deeper level of consciousness

Most professionals I have talked to on this subject maintain that it is impossible to be awake in this state – to be conscious in the unconscious. Psychologists will tell you you're wasting your time. But this is precisely what we are doing in meditation: learning to wake up on a deeper level of consciousness.

If we fall asleep at this level, between a shallower state of consciousness and a deeper one, we cannot go deeper; we just stay on the surface. What we need to do at that point is take one leap and fall in. When the time comes to leap, leap; don't hold back. There is a point where we can pull back, but if we go a little further, there is a point of no return when even if we try to sleep, we won't be able to. Then we slip into a deeper level of consciousness.

There is no need to be despondent over these recurring episodes of drowsiness. This is a reassuring sign that the



Eknath Easwaran, 1980s

nervous system is relaxing. As long as we are making the effort to stay awake, there is no failure. It is when we stop making an effort and yield to the wave of sleep that our meditation actually stops. Then there is no more meditation. Instead of going deeper vertically, we are going off horizontally. All kinds of things can take place when we lose our hold on our attention. If I may sound a note of caution, there is even the possibility that we may wander into an Alice's Wonderland where the demarcation line between fact and fantasy becomes dimmer and dimmer.

Please don't be under the impression that the struggle to resist sleep is a vain effort. Every time we do this we are strengthening our will. It's only a matter of time before we find that we can overcome these waves of drowsiness and make the change to a deeper level of consciousness.

Our greatest enemy

In deep meditation, when we are far below the world of surface sensations and perceptions, we begin to perceive, dimly at first, the *samskaras* that lurk there, which are frightening enough. But, finally, we will face the awful power of our biggest enemy: *tanha*, the obsessive thirst for separate satisfaction. Here, the Buddha says, we finally face the real foe. Only then do we begin to see how many of our difficulties are due to Mara, our greatest enemy, who corrupts and consumes everything.

But Mara is an elusive antagonist. Many years on the spiritual path are spent just reaching the point where we can take him on. In the deeper stages of meditation we will experience some of the most challenging encounters a human being can face. At these times we shouldn't get upset or despondent because we are protected by a very delicate timing: we reach Mara's den only when we have gained the capacity to look at him with detachment, understanding, courage, and control. So we can assure ourselves that even though beasts prowl about in the depths of our consciousness, by incessant valor and unceasing discipline, we can learn to tame them.

To have all the adventure you want, you don't have to go to Africa or India. You can just take a good look deep inside, down into the collective unconscious, to watch an endless parade of

the wildest, most treacherous animals that ever wandered the earth. It is because we believe that the world within is a cultivated garden that we get surprised when we come across a tiger on the trail or a leopard slinking behind a tree. Leopards, you know, don't say, "Good morning, may I eat you?" They leap at your throat. Saints and sages like the Buddha know this. They understand that in our long, long evolution we have all passed through these stages. Even if we do not accept the words of the Buddha, if we accept only Darwin's concept of evolution, we can understand that these creatures in the unconscious are the vestiges of our animal past.

In the Buddhist scriptures there are many stories, called Jatakas, about the Buddha's past lives. I think the Buddha must have entertained his disciples with these stories of his previous incarnations. In one delightful episode he describes how he was a tiger. It must have been a most exhilarating moment to hear the Compassionate One confessing that he had been a tiger. He also says that his wife, Yashodhara, the sweetest, gentlest, loveliest of women, had been a tigress. In a sense he must have been entertaining his disciples, but at the same time he was assuring all of us that these are natural stages of evolution. There is tragedy only if we get stuck in the tiger's skin. The relics of those stages are still with us, like specimens in a museum.

The collective unconscious

The borderland between the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious is very, very hard even to reach, and once reached it seems as impenetrable as the Great Wall of China.



Eknath Easwaran, 1980s

Somehow, we have to breach this solid wall, and that can take a long, long time. Progress can be painfully, frustratingly slow. First, we need to learn to direct our attention like a laser in order to drill a little hole and force an entrance barely large enough to squeeze through. Then we widen the hole until we have a proper gap and can put up a little sign: “Welcome.” We begin to feel confident. It still takes time to go in and come out, but we know now how to do it. We are beginning to feel at ease.

Progress comes in fits and starts

But progress comes in fits and starts. Sometimes we can't get in and discover we have something in our pocket — some kind of attachment — that won't let us through. Sometimes we get stuck and don't know how to get back out. Sometimes we are able to go in easily, but we can't come out; sometimes we can come out, but the next day we can't go in again. One day meditation goes well, but the next day we get stuck. All sorts of things can come in the way. We learn to be observant. "What did I have in my pocket today that kept me from getting in?" We start looking and finally we say, "Oh, maybe that's it!"

On a day when he had a good meditation, I can imagine the Buddha asking himself, "What did I eat? How far did I walk? How many people was I able to help?" He would take everything into account, even physical factors. A skilled archer, he compares this to what he would ask when he hit the target. "How did I stand? What was the position of my arms? How far back did I draw the bowstring?"

As our desire is, so is our will

Penetrating this Great Wall of Consciousness is a rare achievement. It is not impossible, but it requires an unyielding will and unified desire. Without mastering our desires, it is not possible to cross the barrier between the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious.

Most of us never even suspect that it is in our desires that all our power lies, for as our desire is, so is our will. In other words, until we develop the capacity to change our desires, we cannot have any control over our destiny.

Unifying all our desires — transforming all our passions — requires almost superhuman determination. Those who cannot resist challenge may find they are good candidates. For those who like doing what cannot be done, the transformation of desire can have a strong appeal. Even in ordinary life, if we look at those who succeed in secular fields, it's very easy to see that they have deep, unified desires to accomplish these goals.

Desire is power

Now the practical question is: how do we deepen the desire for nirvana? This is one of the most important questions you can ask in life. It changes your whole outlook on desire. Desire is power, and when it is perfectly unified you will be able to pierce the immense wall that separates the personal from the impersonal unconscious.

As you near this point, there comes a time in meditation when you get a distinct feeling that a door is about to open, and you are about to change levels of consciousness. You may have to wait years, but when you're burning with eagerness to discover what lies in the depths of consciousness, when you can hardly wait one more day to enter this treasure house that all scriptures say contains the pearl of untold price — as the Buddha puts it, “the jewel in the lotus of the heart” — you can be assured the door will open. Then your concentration is so complete that without warning, just for a moment, there comes what the Buddhists call a taste of “no-mind” or bodhi. You get a glimpse right through the stream of thought to deeper consciousness, in a blinding glimpse of pure light accompanied by a flood of joy that the Buddha says is greater than the joy of any other attainment.

No division between the within and the without

It is impossible to put such experiences into words, but I can try to give you an elusive picture to the best of my small abilities of how slowly, gradually, you learn to descend into the unconscious and come up again step by step. Imagine it, then, as being like entering a vast swimming pool. First you put your toes in to test the temperature. (I am using a few light touches here, of course, so don't take this literally.) Then slowly, step by step, you go down – three feet, four feet, five feet – and the water closes over your head. There is a tremendous practical advantage to this step-by-step process: otherwise, the danger is that you might suddenly lose awareness of the body and fall, which has happened to some mystics.

Once you have reached this depth, the world within becomes as real as the world without – neither more nor less. That's very important. It's not that the world without becomes less real, but the barrier falls between the world without and the world within. This is an arbitrary barrier. There is no division between the within and the without. There is no inward life and outward life. When this barrier falls, therefore, your dependence upon events in the external world disappears. You realize that you are not dependent for your security upon any event in the world outside you – no individual, no position, no acquisition, no achievement, nothing in the external world at all. You make the discovery that all security is within, all love is within, and with that discovery you become completely independent. You rest completely on today, and because you try today to do whatever lies in your power to show your love and respect for all, you have no doubts about tomorrow.

Completely united with all

In the collective unconscious there is no distance between you and me; we are all there together. That's why I say at that stage there is only all. There is nothing separate. It is not the individual; it's the collective. In these depths, where you are no longer aware of your body, mind, or ego, you are no longer a separate person. You are completely united with all. The joy of it is so intense that you may find it very hard to come up to the world of separateness again. The sheer pull of this joy, the sheer draw of this universal love, has made quite a few mystics forget the world. But when you have a great desire to help people, you can use that desire to bring yourself slowly back up to the surface level. You don't lose any joy in this; the joy of helping, serving, guiding, and supporting others is equal to what you feel deep below.

Words are inadequate to describe these states of consciousness, but the Buddha assures us that they are real, as real as the dinner you had this evening. They are valid experiences which are within the reach of everyone for whom they are an overriding goal. Those who want nirvana the most, those who are prepared to give their all to this supreme goal, will attain it. This is not philosophy but experiential knowledge. It is the timeless message of India and the Buddha that ordinary people like you and me can achieve this highest state. 🌸



Eknath Easwaran, 1980s



The BMCM offices at Ramagiri Ashram

Her Heart Is Full of Joy

Saint Teresa of Avila

Her heart is full of joy with love,
For in the Lord her mind is stilled.
She has renounced every selfish attachment
And draws abiding joy and strength
From the One within.
She lives not for herself, but lives
To serve the Lord of Love in all,
And swims across the sea of life
Breasting its rough waves joyfully.



Christine Easwaran (1921–2022), Easwaran's wife and BMCM Life Trustee

The Power of Words

Christine Easwaran, from our Journal archive

Words wield power. They can penetrate into deeper consciousness, influencing thoughts and behavior. For that reason, words are chosen with great care in many professions, ranging from politics to poetry.

Easwaran, too, chose his words carefully. In fact, they were his vocation when he was a young man making a name as a writer and public speaker and later as a professor of English literature.

His appreciation for the power of words started early. Growing up in an orthodox Hindu family in South India, Easwaran was taught at an early age to memorize prayers and Vedic verses in Sanskrit – the ancient language that he studied in school, as well as under the temple priest. In high school he studied English, which was not spoken in his village, and fell in love with English literature, memorizing great amounts of poetry from Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of Songs & Lyrics*. Even in his eighties he delighted in quoting these poems to illustrate his spiritual talks.

The beginning of passage meditation

It was Easwaran's deep affinity for words that prepared the way for his great spiritual discovery. Significantly, the first book he bought when he went to college was a second-hand copy of the Bhagavad Gita, a small volume in Sanskrit which we are happy to have in our archives. Sacred verses from this popular



Easwaran and Christine, 1970s

scripture came to his rescue years later when he turned to it for solace and understanding. Complete concentration on the holy words of the Gita opened doors into his inner consciousness, revealing their deep meaning and changing his life forever.

This was the beginning of the method of meditation associated with his name. Passage meditation, as it is now called, involves going slowly, in the mind, through the words of a passage from the scriptures or mystics that embodies one's highest ideals and appeals deeply to the heart.

"The principle is simple," he explained. "We become what we meditate on. Slow, sustained concentration on these words drives them deep into consciousness. There they take root and begin to create wonderful changes in our lives."

Passages from the world's spiritual traditions

When recommending passages for meditation, Easwaran chose with precision and care. “A meditation passage is more than great poetry,” he told us. “It is an instrument. It is going to transform your character, conduct, and consciousness, so it should be chosen with the same care as a sculptor chooses a chisel. It should be positive, practical, inspiring, and universal. And it should be inspired. The words of a meditation passage draw their power from the depth of experience behind them. When Teresa of Avila tells us, ‘Let nothing disturb you,’ it comes from the depths of her soul, where all of us are one. Those words are like arrows shot straight into our hearts from hers.”

Searching for the perfect meditation passage for a Western audience, Easwaran settled on the Prayer of Saint Francis: “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.” Soon, his passion to share and his gift for poetry led him to make English translations of the passages that had meant the most to him, beginning with the Bhagavad Gita. Those translations are doubly charged. Added to the power of their source is the passion and wisdom of this gifted teacher who, in seeking meaning for his own life, discovered this simple method that anyone can use to attain life’s goal without any change of religion or belief.

Most of these translations and many other beautiful passages from the world’s spiritual traditions can be found in his anthologies *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* and *Timeless Wisdom*. 🌸

Choosing Passages

Ekknath Easwaran, from *Passage Meditation*

You may wonder why I recommend an inspirational passage for meditation. First, it is training in concentration. Most of our mental powers are so widely dispersed that they are relatively ineffective. When I was a boy, I used to hold a lens over paper until the sun's rays gathered to an intense focus and set the paper aflame. In meditation, we gradually focus the mind so that when we meet a difficulty, we can cut right through the nonessentials.

Second, we begin to resemble and actually become whatever we give our attention to. People who think and dream about money have minds pervaded by dimes and dollars, shares and properties, profit and loss. Everything they see, everything they do, is colored by this concern. Similarly with those who dwell on power, revenge, pleasure, or fame. For this reason the Buddha opened his Dhammapada with the magnificent line, "All that we are is the result of what we have thought." And today, despite our technology and science, people are most insecure because they persist in thinking about and going after things that have no capacity to give them security.

The spirit of self-forgetfulness and love

An inspirational passage turns our thoughts to what is permanent, to those things that put a final end to insecurity. In meditation, the passage becomes imprinted on our consciousness. As we drive it deeper and deeper, the words come to

life within us, transforming all our thoughts, feelings, words, and deeds.

For this reason, please don't try to improve upon the words of the prayer or change them in any way. Just as they stand, they embody the spiritual wisdom of Saint Francis. When Ali Baba wanted to enter the cave of the forty thieves, he had to have the right password. He could yell out, "Open, brown rice" or "Open, shredded wheat" forever, but nothing was going to happen until he said, "Open, sesame." Meditate on Saint Francis's own words, and you will find that you begin to resonate with the spirit of self-forgetfulness and love that the words contain.

A varied repertoire

Using the same passage over and over is fine at the outset, but in time, the words may seem stale. You may find yourself repeating them mechanically, without sensitivity to their meaning. I suggest you memorize new pieces from the traditions of Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam so you will have a varied repertoire. As you commit a new passage to memory, it is good to spend some time reflecting on the meaning of the words and their practical application to your life. But please don't do this while you are actually meditating.

In selecting a passage, be sure it really inspires. Don't let yourself be carried away by literary beauty or novelty. Wordsworth and Shelley may have been splendid poets, but for passages on which to remake your life, I suggest you draw only on the scriptures and the great mystics of the world. And avoid choosing passages that are negative, that take a harsh and deprecatory view of the body, of our past mistakes, or of life in

the world. We want to draw forth our positive side, our higher Self, and the passages should move you to become steadfast, compassionate, and wise. Keeping a notebook of pieces to memorize may help. Later on, after you have learned to concentrate well and need a greater challenge, try a longer work. I find the Katha Upanishad, for instance, perfect for meditation. It is lengthy and complex; you have to be alert to use it. When it goes smoothly, you will feel you are traveling down one lane of a six-lane highway, such an expert driver that you hardly have to move a hand.

The mind that is disciplined in meditation

Once I went with an old friend to a meeting in the hills. The road twisted continuously, and his driving impressed me. On hairpin turns in India I have seen drivers lunge and clasp the wheel tightly, their faces grimly set. But my friend took each curve with an easy spin of the wheel, letting it swing back on its own.

“That’s amazing,” I said. “How in the world did you ever manage to learn that?”

He answered tersely, “Machines obey me.”

This is a good analogy with the mind that is disciplined in meditation. When we are fully concentrated on the passage, the mind obeys us. It will make the exact turn necessary. We know the road, the curves, the precipices, and where we felt intimidated before, now there is the satisfaction of mastery. 🌸

Holding to the Constant

Lao Tzu

Break into the peace within,
Hold attention in stillness,
And in the world outside
You will ably master the ten thousand things.

All things rise and flourish
Then go back to their roots.
Seeing this return brings true rest,
Where you discover who you really are.
Knowing who you are, you will find the constant.
Those who lack harmony with the constant court danger,
But those who have it gain new vision.

They act with compassion;
Within themselves, they can find room for everything.
Having room, they rule themselves and lead others wisely.
Being wise, they live in accordance
With the nature of things.
Emptied of self and one with nature,
They become filled with the Tao.
The Tao endures forever.
For those who have attained harmony with the Tao
Will never lose it, even if their bodies die.

Community Stories

The Words of the Passage Come to Life

“An inspirational passage turns our thoughts to what is permanent, to those things that put a final end to insecurity. In meditation, the passage becomes imprinted on our consciousness. As we drive it deeper and deeper, the words come to life within us, transforming all our thoughts, feelings, words, and deeds.” — Eknath Easwaran

From members of our passage meditation community:

I often revisit the “Prayer of Saint Francis” during tough times, as its universal insights help address many challenges. Each line offers a solution – like “Where there is doubt, faith” – reminding me that faith can overcome uncertainty. This passage has supported me through difficulties, and I value its clear guidance.

One of my favorite passages is “Great Life-Giving Spirit” from the Native American tradition. A fixture of my morning meditation, it always grounds me, even when away from home, and gives gentle guidance on how to conduct myself during the day.

In these turbulent times, I am grateful for Saint Teresa’s lively presence in “Her Heart Is Full of Joy.” In just a few lines, she clearly describes the who, the what, the why, and the how of a life in search of unity consciousness. Her strong, feminine voice speaks to me, shows me the way. By using the third person, she suggests I make it my own, and I accept her invitation with determination!

The passage “The Way to Peace” by Swami Sivananda is one that has fascinated me from the first time I read it. I found it at a time when I was stewing over poor treatment I was subjected to at my job. This passage challenged me to return kindness for unkindness – which initially struck me as near impossible! Nevertheless, I memorized the passage and used it – keep using it – in meditation, to heal ill will and find peace with others and the storms that life sometimes brings.

My favorite passage is “Entering into Joy” by Saint Augustine because the whole passage is a vivid description of the spiritual path and our goal of Self-realization. He describes the goal as, among other things, “. . . this one vision which ravishes and absorbs and fixes the beholder in joy . . .” – wonderful words to meditate on!

Easwaran’s translation of the Bhagavad Gita opened up a world of wise and loving guidance for me. “Be Aware of Me Always” includes this promise from Sri Krishna which always lifts my spirits: “Leave all other support and look to me for protection. I will purify you from the sins of the past. Do not grieve.”

The passage I return to most often in *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* is Lao Tzu’s “Holding to the Constant.” I first turned to it during meditation while caring for a loved one in their final months. Sleep was elusive, and a calm mind even more so. But this passage reminded me that peace could still be found within, and that I had the capacity to accept what was happening and to help those around me. It also reassured me that dying was not an end, but a return to nature, and to rest.

See bmcm.org/passages for audio recordings and text of these passages.

New Passages and a Varied Repertoire

“Using the same passage over and over is fine at the outset, but in time, the words may seem stale. You may find yourself repeating them mechanically, without sensitivity to their meaning. I suggest you memorize new pieces from the traditions of Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam so you will have a varied repertoire.”

— Eknath Easwaran

From members of our passage meditation community:

After several years of practicing passage meditation and enjoying the wonderful variety of passages in *God Makes the Rivers to Flow*, I decided to incorporate Ansari of Herat’s “Invocations” in my rotation. Luckily, I learned at a retreat how to take on the long ones (basically one page by one page) and found that it was a mini discipline in itself to spend days and weeks slowly memorizing or refreshing this lengthy passage, section by section. Even more special was discovering the stunning beauty and wise advice incorporated in this very devotional piece. A favorite stanza is: “Watch vigilantly the state of thine own mind. Love of God begins in harmlessness.”

The Upanishads are a challenge to learn, but I find them quite satisfying to meditate on. They’re so hard to comprehend and you just have to hope that the meaning will sink in. I like the passage “The Inner Ruler,” for instance, for its clear instruction that neither “the world without” nor “the world within” alone are

real, but “those who combine action with meditation go across the sea of death . . . and enter into immortality.”

I feel that meditating on the wonderful diversity of traditions in *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* and *Timeless Wisdom* is helping me to overcome my separateness, and take joy in memorizing passages outside of my own religious background.

I love the huge variety of the passages offered in Easwaran’s method of passage meditation, in his anthologies *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* and *Timeless Wisdom*. The instructions on how to meditate are always the same, but Easwaran encourages us to explore different spiritual traditions and to keep learning new passages, so my practice remains fresh and interesting. It’s enabled me to keep meditating for decades, and I know the passages will only gain in depth and meaning in the years to come.

What I particularly appreciate about meditating on an inspirational passage is the opportunity to be immersed in a particular selection from the purest expressions of human encounters with the divine over five thousand years of civilization. Sri Easwaran has given us an inestimable gift by bringing together the most powerful, practical, and positive testimonials from mystics and scriptures of all traditions – especially chosen to be drawn deep into consciousness through meditation. After many years of using as many inspirational passages as possible, they all seem to have acquired a subtle resonance from the mighty chorus of myriad voices down the centuries singing the same song of union with God.



Shanti meditation hall, Ramagiri Ashram

The Way to Peace

Swami Sivananda

If anyone speaks ill of you,

Praise him always.

If anyone injures you,

Serve him nicely.

If anyone persecutes you,

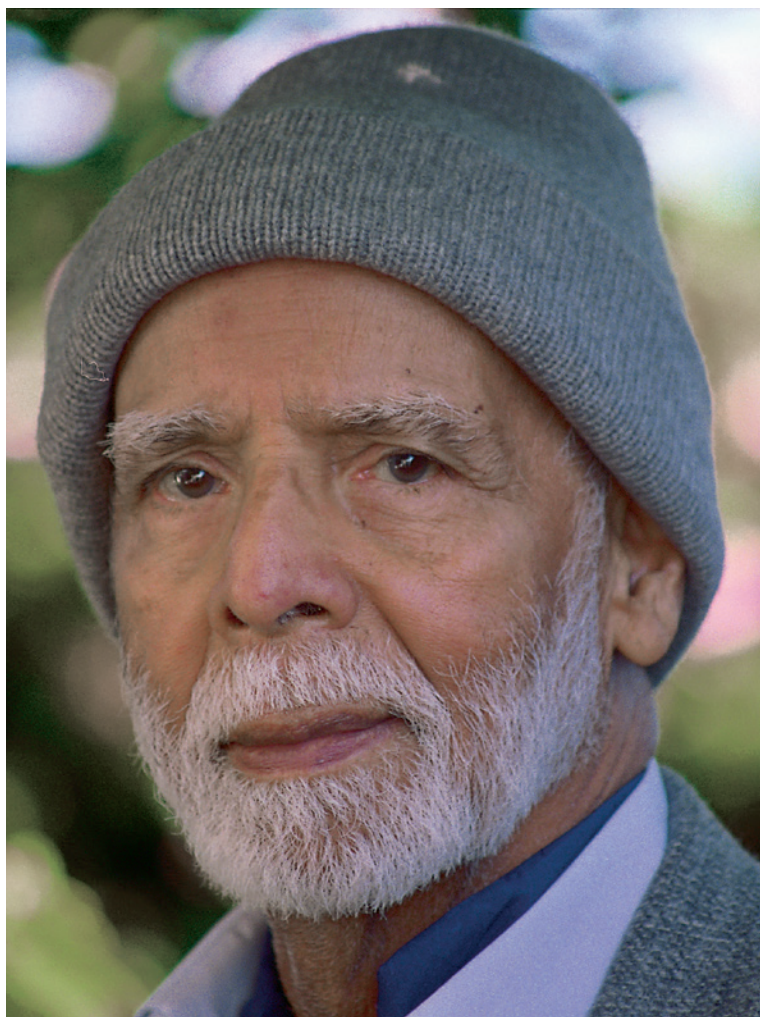
Help him in all possible ways.

You will attain immense strength.

You will control anger and pride.

You will enjoy peace, poise and serenity.

You will become divine.



Eknath Easwaran, 1990s

Closing the Circle

Ekknath Easwaran, from *Essence of the Upanishads*

In these last stages of sadhana, we are trying to keep consciousness in a continuous, unbroken channel. The morning and evening periods of meditation set the standard; then we try to extend these periods of one-pointed attention through the rest of the day. While we are working at something, we give the job our complete attention. And the minute the job is over, we start the mantram. Attention must become one smooth-flowing stream from morning to night and through the night until morning again. In a sense, it is like taking two ends of consciousness and trying to bring them together into a closed circle, so that there is no leakage of prana at all.

At the beginning of sadhana, this may not seem like much of an achievement. We have hold of about ten degrees of the circle, so we have no idea of what it means to close the other three hundred fifty degrees. But as the ends of the circle get closer, it is like trying to close floodgates against a powerful river. A student of physics will tell you that the smaller the opening across a river, the faster the water flows through. It is the same in consciousness. All the thoughts that could not get our attention while we were meditating or repeating the mantram, all twenty-four hours worth of them, are just waiting to rush in if we give them an opening.

Last to be closed are the hours of nighttime. As you begin to wake up inside, it is only natural to find yourself wakeful for hours while you lie in bed at night. These are terribly critical

times, for there is very little to do to keep the mind engaged. To keep attention from wandering, all you have to hang on to is the mantram. And the fight is on.

Absorbed in the mantram

At this stage, concentration is really deep. For five, ten, fifteen minutes you stand inside a kind of magic circle: your mind is absorbed in the mantram, so no other thought can come in. But then you become aware of all kinds of other thoughts outside, skulking around and trying to tempt you out.

*

Great saints may endure great temptations like this; smaller people like us will have smaller ones. But all of us will be tested to the full measure of our capacity. To everyone these tests must come.

As long as you cling to the mantram, all that these fierce distractions can do is dance around and try to tempt you out. “Come on, Nachiketa, just step outside. Elephants, chariots, dancing girls with eternal youth – you don’t have to choose; you can have them all.” But anyone can get drawn outside by all this hullabaloo; and once you get outside, your samskaras will beat you up. They cannot finish you off, but they will pummel all the prana out of you, rob you of your security, and run away, leaving you with a sinking heart. But on the other hand, there is no need to feel panicky when seductive distractions come; they are an essential part of the drama. You cannot say, “I don’t want that Iago on the stage”; if there were no villain, the play could not be acted. All you can do is cling to the mantram and not let your mind even flicker to these thoughts. Grit your teeth and let

them caper all they like. Eventually, if you do not give them an audience, they will get tired and go away.

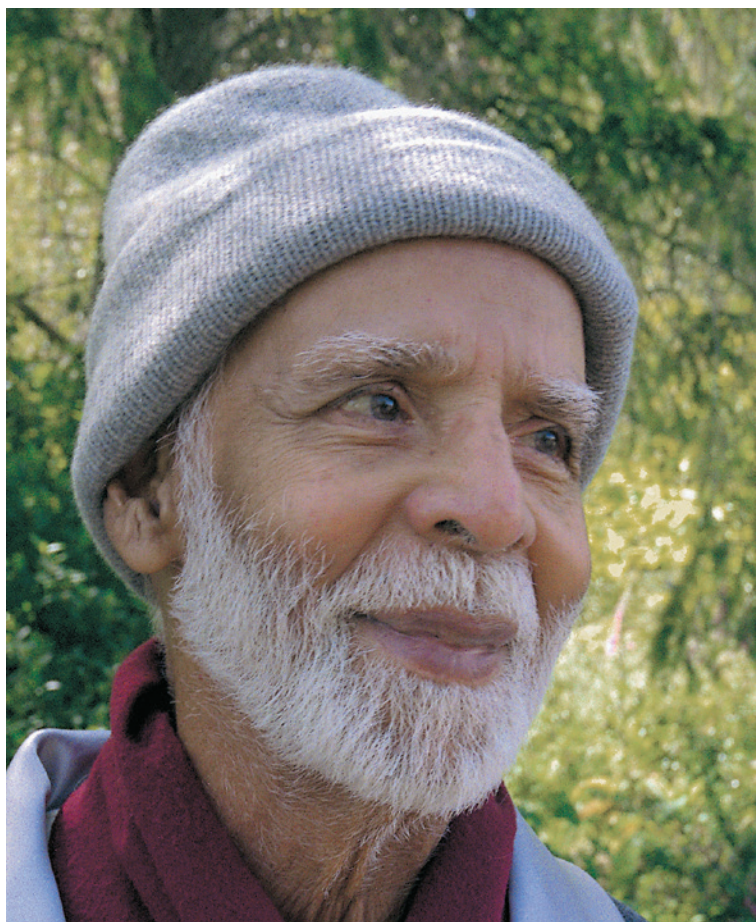
Wake up even in the unconscious

Even in sleep this struggle goes on. Then it is like shadow-boxing in a world of shadows. You are deep in the unconscious, which is terra incognita for the will. Yet you have to learn to wake up even in the unconscious; the whole of the mind must be flooded with light. This usually happens in stages. When you are sunk in sleep, part of you is awake with a little will, and that part tries to repeat the mantram. Sometimes you cannot even remember it. There is something you are supposed to be doing, but you cannot think what it is; or if you remember the *Ra-*, you cannot remember the *-ma*.

As you can see, I am not trying to disguise what a challenge this is. But even at this stage there are rewards. For one, you may suddenly hear what mystics call the “cosmic sound,” for which the nearest approximation in sensory sound is the word *Om*. You cannot anticipate it or bring it on, but suddenly you will hear this sound rolling through consciousness, not drowning but absorbing all other sounds. It is such a tremendous experience that Saint Francis says if it had gone on longer, so sweet was the joy of it that his body would have melted away.

The most delicious agony in sadhana

If all this seems agonizing, it is the most delicious agony in sadhana. Words cannot describe these experiences. They are so far beyond the realm of everyday thought and sensation that in both East and West, aspirants fall back here on poetry and the



Eknath Easwaran, 1990s

language of a lover to his or her Beloved. In these last stages, the Sufis say, all veils but one have fallen from the object of our desire. We can make out the eyes of the Beloved, the hair, the smile, but nothing clearly, and all other desires are consumed in the overwhelming longing to tear that last veil aside.

Every day there is this delightful pain of separation, this impatient patience. You expect the veil to fall that very evening, yet you are prepared to wait another day more. Mystics everywhere speak this way, and scholars just throw up their hands and leave. They want rational talk and all they get is contradiction. It is not that mystics are inadequate when it comes to logic; the inadequacy is in language. Give them a language that embraces opposites, that transcends the senses; then they will express all this. Otherwise words have to fail.

The end of years of searching is very near

All sorts of signs come now that the end of your years of searching is very near. It is like waiting for the curtain to go up on a play for which you have been waiting a hundred years. You are seated in the front row, the theater is full; now the lights are dimmed and everyone falls still in breathless anticipation. Behind the curtain you can see tantalizing glimpses: props being adjusted, the last-minute movements of stagehands, a ripple of the heavy draperies as someone brushes by. Every morning in meditation, every evening as you fall asleep, it is as if the whole universe is waiting for the play to begin at last.

And finally, just when you do not expect it, the curtain rises and you are lifted out of time into the unitive state, beyond change, beyond death. 🌸

Easwaran's Eight-Point Program of Passage Meditation

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

About Eknath Easwaran

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

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

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

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



Further Resources for Learning to Meditate and Deepening Your Practice

From the BMCM Programs team

Introductory Webinars

A chance to try out passage meditation.

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

Introductory Weekend Retreats

Everything you need to get your passage meditation practice started.

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

Passage Meditation – A Complete Spiritual Practice

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



An online retreat

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

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

Online Retreats, Webinars, and Workshops for 2025

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

Setu (Senior) Retreat:

September 12–16

Introductory Weekend Retreat:

September 26–28

Returnee Workshop:

October 4

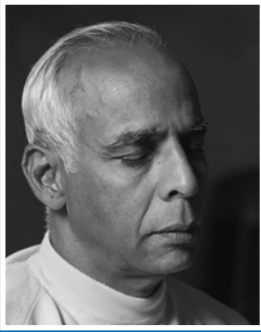
Weeklong Retreat:

October 17–21

Returnee Weekend Retreat:

November 7–9

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



We become what we meditate on. Slow, sustained concentration on these words drives them deep into consciousness. There they take root and begin to create wonderful changes in our lives.

—Eknath Easwaran

Blue Mountain Center of Meditation

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