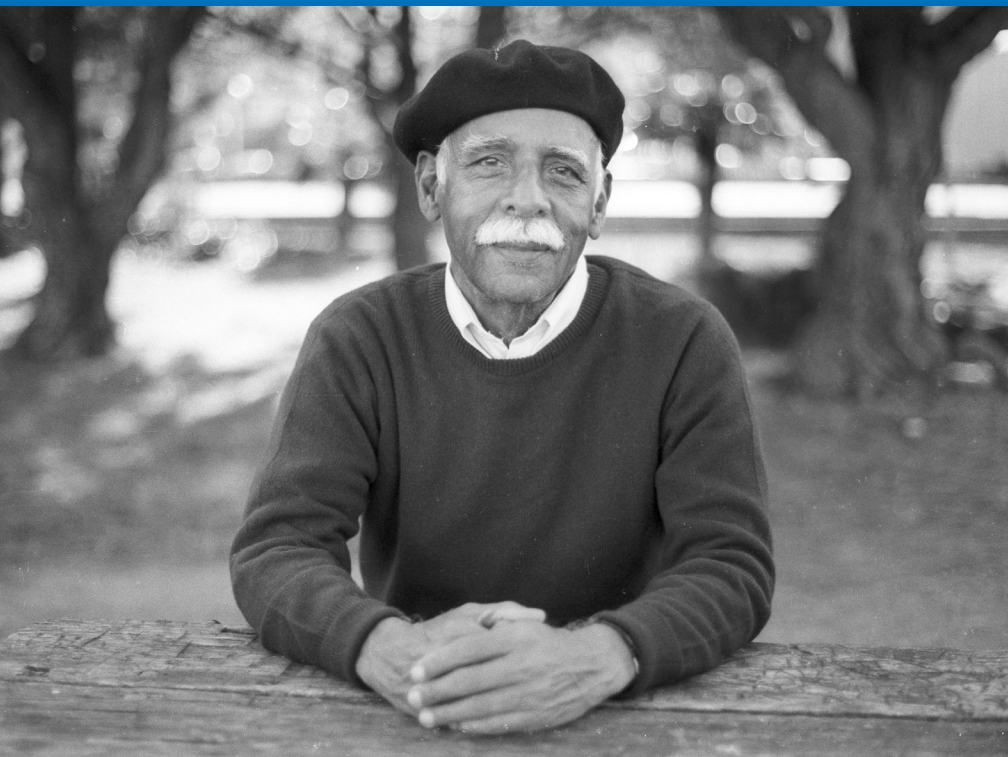


Ekknath Easwaran's

Blue Mountain Journal

Meditation and Spiritual Living



Summer 2014

The Power and Peace of a One-Pointed Mind

In This Issue

By Christine Easwaran



We are continuing our series on Eknath Easwaran's eight-point program of meditation:

1. Meditation on a Passage
2. Repetition of a Mantram
3. Slowing Down
4. One-Pointed Attention
5. Training the Senses
6. Putting Others First
7. Spiritual Fellowship
8. Spiritual Reading

Our last issue focused on Slowing Down; this time we look at One-Pointed Attention. These two points go hand in hand. Easwaran advised us repeatedly to go through each day without hurry, giving complete attention to one thing at a time.

But don't those words sound familiar? His regular instructions in meditation, too, included a phrase we were intended to remember always: "Go through the words of the passage slowly, giving complete attention to each word so that it drops like a pearl into deeper consciousness." All these eight points, he reminds us, are meant to train the mind to be one-pointed throughout the day and even the night, because a one-pointed mind "sets the stage for Self-realization." This is the full promise of undivided attention: it brings the power and peace of meditation into our daily lives.

Christine Easwaran

Summer 2014
Volume 25, No. 2

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The *Blue Mountain Journal* is a publication of The Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, a California 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1961 by Eknath Easwaran to carry on his work.

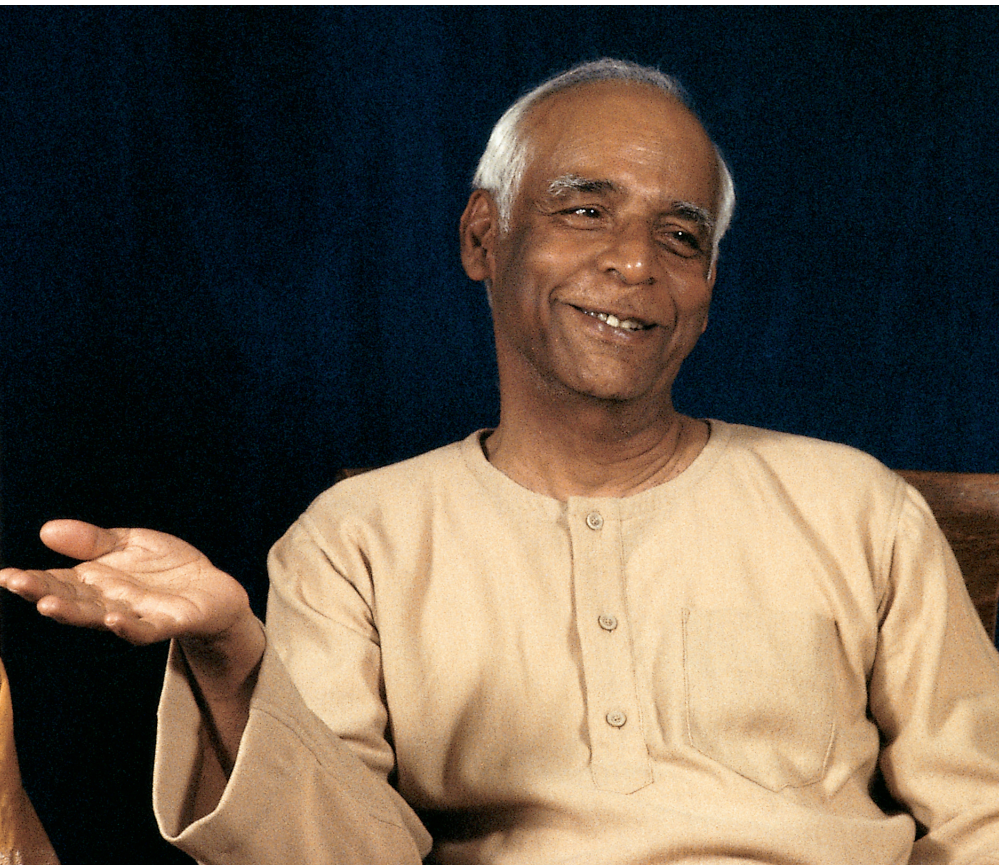
Ekknath Easwaran on Attention

We live where our attention is. If attention wanders all over the map, our lives cannot help being scattered, shallow, and confused.

By contrast, complete concentration is the secret of genius in any field. Those who can put their attention on a task or goal and keep it there are bound to make their mark on life.

Developing a one-pointed mind will enrich your life moment by moment. You will find that your senses are keener, your emotions more stable, your intellect more lucid, your sensitivity to the needs of others heightened. Whatever you do, you will be there more fully. You won't forget things, because now your mind is engaged. You won't become mentally fatigued, for you are conserving your powers.

And perhaps most precious of all, you will not ignore the distress or joy of others, because in looking into their eyes you will be looking truly into their hearts.



Easwaran in an informal question and answer session with students at Ramagiri Ashram, 1978.

The Power and Peace of a One-Pointed Mind

Frequently Asked Questions
answered by Eknath Easwaran

I really want to help my community and the world, but it seems so hard. Why do our efforts have so little effect?

The answer is that most of us have minds that are scattered or distracted: sometimes positive, sometimes negative, constantly changing with our shifting moods and desires. Flickering attention is a sure sign of a divided mind. Division is tension. Division is friction. Division is ineffectiveness. Division is futility. And a mind divided cannot stand. Most of us have a mind that is divided; that is why it sometimes cannot stand under the impact of life.

It is the concentrated, focused mind that reaches people. All the great changes in the world for good and for ill have come from the impact of men and women with an overriding single-ness of purpose and a concentrated mind. In our own times, on the positive side, Gandhi is a perfect example.

The last hundred years have seen incessant turbulence, change, and danger. Around the world, people are living with a deep anxiety about the future. In such situations it is only natural to ask now and then, "Why was I born into times like these?" The answer I would give is that we have been born to be of help to others. Desperate times are a sign of a more desperate need. To make our full contribution, we need to train the mind to be at peace and then radiate that peace to those around us.

It is the concentrated, focused mind that reaches people.

As our capacity to contribute increases, greater responsibilities will come to us.

Can you say more about making our full contribution? I'm wondering if I should change my job.

Whoever we are, we can improve our contribution to the world simply by giving complete attention to the job at hand in a spirit of detachment. We don't have to compare our lives or work with others'. All that is expected of us is that we give our very best to whatever responsibilities come our way. As our capacity to contribute increases, greater responsibilities will come to us. That is the way spiritual growth has always taken place down the centuries.

When I began to meditate, I don't think it ever occurred to me to change jobs or to try to make a "spiritual" contribution with my writing. I simply gave more and more attention to my teaching — to my colleagues and especially to my students. I was meditating every day on the words of the Bhagavad Gita, where Sri Krishna counsels: "Do your best; then leave the results to me."

So what does that mean in practice? And how does it fit with one-pointedness?

It is helpful to keep each of these three aspects in mind — attention, detachment, and the job at hand. But before I comment on them, I want to emphasize that they are really not separate. They are three elements of a single skill.

When you dedicate yourself to the task at hand with complete concentration and without any trace of egotistic involvement, you are learning to live completely in the present. You are making yourself whole, undivided, which is the goal of the spiritual life and the meaning of that much-misunderstood word *yoga*.

In reality, all these three amount to unifying our attention. We don't usually think in these terms, but when we ignore responsibilities, we are actually dividing our attention. When we postpone or neglect a task that needs doing, we are dividing attention. When we do a job halfheartedly, we are dividing attention.

Even when we get personally entangled in our activities, we are dividing our attention. And if "dividing attention" sounds abstract, let me assure you it is utterly practical. When we divide our attention, we split ourselves, which weakens everything we do. In this sense, perhaps the simplest expression of our goal in meditation is that we are trying to make ourselves whole.

Could you tell us more about how to do that?

Let me offer a few practical suggestions from my own experience.

Over time, every job becomes routine. For a year or two everything seems new; every task presents an interesting challenge. But after a few years, it's "Oh, another patient, another client, another performance, another report." New things have a way of becoming old; new hats become old hat; everything becomes passé.

The answer is not to change jobs, drop out, or walk away, but to give more attention and do the very best we can. With complete attention, everything in life becomes fresh.

Therefore, the Gita says, don't ask, "Is this interesting? Is this exciting?" If a job is exciting today, it's going to be depressing later. Unless it is at the expense of life, give it your very best. Doing a routine job well, with concentration, is the greatest challenge I can imagine. You're not just doing

With complete attention, everything in life becomes fresh.

Whatever the job, do it as a service to others.

a job but learning a skill: the skill of improving concentration, which pays rich dividends in every aspect of life.

Finally, in attending to the task at hand, the Gita urges us never to get attached to personal pleasure or profit. Whatever the job, do it as a service to others. Don't do it to gain credit or prestige or to win attention.

And please don't ever compare yourself with others, saying things like "If only I had that person's job." Jealousy can be terrible anywhere, but it is especially terrible in work. It not only separates people; it actually sets you back in your spiritual growth. That is why the Gita advises us to give our best with the welfare of all in mind, in which our own welfare is included.

This is the essence of the Gita's message. Interest in personal gain is what gets us entangled. We get stuck in a particular groove, and that handicaps our performance; eventually we can't do the job well, we can't see that we aren't doing it well, and we can't let go of it. We get so entangled in one particular aspect that we forget all other aspects — forget, for example, that people are waiting, or that bills are piling up.

Through many, many years of unremitting effort based on the practice of meditation, we can train the mind to be detached from every attempt to cling for security to anything outside. That's what detachment means: you need nothing from anything or anyone outside you; you are complete.

As this kind of detachment grows, all the desires that have been flowing towards money and material possessions and prestige and power begin to flow back into your own hands, bringing a tremendous consolidation of vitality, love, and wisdom to everything you do.

I've always worked hard, and with good concentration, but I still get stressed.

The Gita is essentially a call to action. But it is a call to selfless action, that is, action without any selfish attachment to the results.

In other words, it is not action or effort that we must surrender; it is self-will — and this is something that is terribly difficult to do. You must do your best constantly, yet never allow yourself to become involved in whether things work out the way you want.

It takes many years of practice to learn this skill, but once you have it, as Gandhi says, you will never lose your nerve. All sense of inadequacy goes. It is enough that the job needs to be done, and that you are doing your absolute best to do it. Then, no matter how stiff the challenges or how bleak the prospects, you can throw yourself into selfless action without diffidence or fatigue.

Sometimes people ask me incredulously, "You mean you're not interested in the results of what you do?" Of course I am interested. I doubt that there is anybody more interested in his work than I am, because I know how much people can benefit from what we are doing at the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation. But after many years of practice, I have learned to do my best and then not worry about whether things will work out my way.

This habit of worrying is a significant comment on our times. I know people who put a great deal of effort into developing this habit. When they leave home, they worry about whether they have locked the door; they have got to go back and turn the key in the lock to make doubly sure. Then they realize they have left the letter inside and worry whether they have remembered to write the

Do your best, but don't get involved in whether things work out the way you want.

The person who can give undivided attention is a real peacemaker.

address. If we lock the door and mail our letters with attention on what we are doing, these little problems don't arise at all.

It is in these small matters of daily life that lack of concentration shows up easily. People worry because they don't concentrate. Whatever you are doing, give it your full attention. We can guard ourselves against tension by learning to be mindful in everything we do.

I have one very intimidating colleague. I don't know what to do with him.

One-pointed attention is one secret of greatness during times of conflict. The person who can give undivided attention when others are being unpleasant is a real peacemaker. Slowly he or she can disarm the hostile person simply by listening without hostility, with complete and loving attention.

When you see opposition, do not get afraid. Look upon tough opposition as a challenge to test your inner growth — to see if your capacities have grown so that through patience, courtesy, and the depth of your conviction, you can win over your opponent into a fast friend.

But all this takes time, and it takes the capacity to concentrate. You have to be willing to develop these skills, which is the purpose of slowing down and one-pointed attention.

Six Ways to Tame an Unruly Mind

By Eknath Easwaran

1. Start with meditation

Though our mind may be three-pointed or four-pointed or a hundred-pointed now, we train it to be one-pointed in meditation. This remarkable discipline brings all the powers of the mind to an intense focus — a single point on which we have put our attention. As our meditation deepens, we shall discover that where we thought we had only a tiny, rather leaky light, we possess a tremendous beacon that can instantly illumine any problem.

2. Do only one thing at a time

But training the mind is very much like training a pup. If you try to teach a puppy to obey you for half an hour and then let it do whatever it likes the rest of the day, you will never have a well-behaved pet — and if you try to teach your mind this way, it will tear up your relationships, bully you into indulging it, and generally make a mess of your life.

Outside the time of meditation, then, what I recommend is simple but intriguingly difficult: do only one thing at a time and give it your full attention. This is the key to doing a good job of any kind.

In the modern world we have become so accustomed to dividing our attention that we take it for granted. When we divide our attention this way, we cannot do full justice to any of the things we are attending to. I would say that anything that is worth doing is worth giving our full attention to.

Train attention at every opportunity, even in little things, so the capacity is there when you need it.

Practice with routine tasks

The essential problem in doing one thing at a time is that we don't really want to — or, more accurately, the mind doesn't want to. The wandering mind gets bored easily, so it likes to combine a task like brushing teeth with reading the *Wall Street Journal* or learning Italian. "Why waste time on your teeth?" the mind wants to know. "Why not do something interesting too?"

Actually, the Buddha would say, it is doing two things at once that truly wastes time. All we are doing is teaching the mind to do what it likes.

The problem with this is not found in moments of dental hygiene. It is discovered in times of crisis, when we can't stop thinking about something painful or oppressive no matter how much we desire to. Just when we most need some control over our attention, we are helpless. The answer is to train attention at every opportunity, even in little things, so the capacity is there when we need it.

Some tasks need total concentration

Whatever the work, one-pointed attention averts mistakes and costly accidents. While driving, for example, I suggest not talking to other people in the car. When you are using powerful tools or dangerous instruments, to provide an absolute measure of safety, you should be totally concentrated on the task. You may be in the kitchen, for example, cutting vegetables with an exceedingly sharp knife. That's no time to discuss who's going to win this year's Oscars. If you must discuss the Best Picture of the Year, put your knife down, get the other person's full attention, and then cast your vote.

Music, or silence?

Any person who has a great love for an art will scrupulously avoid splitting concentration by doing two things at once. True lovers of music will instinctively close their eyes when they are listening because they don't want any of their consciousness to be diverted.

On the other hand, I've gone into bookstores and reading rooms and heard music being played. Those are the places where there should be complete silence. Respect for the book we are reading demands it; even respect for the music demands it.

My excessive music-listening habit

One of my biggest challenges comes from clinging desperately to my habit of listening to music while doing other things: cleaning, cooking, eating, driving, sometimes working.

At a recent Young Adult retreat I was thinking again about my excessive music-listening habits and feeling discouraged. Then I had a great realization: there were plenty of places in my life where I was already being pretty successful at one-pointed attention, specifically in my interactions at work.

So I made a goal to increase my efforts at giving my students and coworkers quality one-pointed attention for the last few weeks of the quarter. As a result I've noticed a significant increase in my ability to be one-pointed outside of these interactions! I no longer listen to music all the time, like I used to, and sometimes find that I actually can't accomplish the task at hand with music playing.

For me with just about any of the points, it's always been most efficient and successful to double my efforts in places where I'm already having some success, since I've found that those efforts make their way into the more "sticky" parts of my life where it's hard to apply direct effort.

From a journal reader

Giving someone full attention says clearly, “You matter to me.”

3. Listen

One-pointed attention is most rewarding in personal relationships. When we give complete attention to the person we are with, even if she is contradicting our opinions on tax reform or explaining the peculiarities of Roman law, boredom disappears from our relationships. People are not boring; we get bored because our attention wanders. Giving someone our full attention says clearly, “You matter to me. You have my respect.”

If we are listening to a friend, even if a parrot flies down and perches on his head we should not get excited, point to the parrot, and break out, “Excuse me for interrupting, but there’s a parrot on your head.” We should be able to concentrate so hard on what our friend is saying that we can tell this urge, “Keep quiet and don’t distract me. Afterwards I’ll tell him about the bird.”

Listen to your critics, too

When relationships are not particularly cordial, one-pointed attention is even more important. When somebody is being critical of you, your mind will naturally tend to skitter away. That is the natural response of the mind to any painful experience. One of the most powerful ways to teach your mind to remain in the present is to give all your attention to what that person is saying, even if it is something you do not like to hear. And don’t take your eyes off that person, either. A wandering eye is a sure sign of a wandering mind.

People can’t help responding deeply

When we are able to give our one-pointed attention to everything we do, other people cannot help responding deeply, no matter what the relationship.

Children particularly thrive on this sort of attention. They are very keen observers, and they know when we are not really there. By giving them our full attention, we assure them of our love far more than when we buy them toys or send them off to the movies for the afternoon, and we are doing them a great service by setting a personal example of one-pointedness.

4. Know where to put your attention

As we train ourselves to be one-pointed, we should strengthen our discrimination and will at

Mornings with my son

I have to be out of the house by a certain time or I will be late. I have a 10 year old son and he has to get ready for school and do his chores before we leave.

For years, I have set aside prayer/meditation time in the morning. During this time, I feel peaceful and get centered, calm and ready for the day. But sometimes, my mind would start to pick up the momentum as I began to get ready. I would be thinking of my shower, while making breakfast and thinking of the commute while telling my son to do his chores and so on. It made for a tense and hurried environment with agitation, short tempers and yelling. I did not like the stress and I know my son did not either.

I started saying my mantram, *My God and My All*. What I noticed was that every time my mind wanted to jump ahead to the next “thing to do”, I would say it and instantly be returned to the task at hand. Suddenly, while making toast, that’s all I would be doing ... making toast! The feeling was peaceful, relaxing and calm. No more angst! I continued to use it throughout our morning and the whole atmosphere changed. And it was very calming in my spirit to be present in each thing I was doing.

It also helps in my attention to my son. Now when he is talking, I am listening and not thinking about what else I need to be doing.

From a journal reader



Young Adult interns on a soil erosion project at the BMCM and in quiet study at a meditation retreat.

the same time, so that we know where to put our attention and how to shift it when necessary. The person with strong likes and dislikes will try to move away from what he does not like doing and throw himself with extravagant zeal into what he does like doing.

We have a pungent story from my old state of Kerala illustrating this. Here is a farmer at harvest time, looking at the fields of rice that must be cut, bundled, brought home, threshed, and stored. His livelihood depends on this. But it is a huge undertaking, and his will turns to jelly at the very thought of it.

Then his eye falls on his bullock cart, and he notices how dilapidated it has come to look. In a flash of inspiration, he decides to paint it. The project fires him with enthusiasm. He doesn't just go to a paint store and buy a can of off-white enamel; he plans the design painstakingly, finds his own natural pigments, and mixes just the right colors with elaborate care. And then, while the rice stands in the fields still waiting to be harvested, he settles down to paint intricate floral designs on the wheels.

We are all adept at painting bullock cart wheels. When our term paper is three weeks late, we decide it is time to take apart our motorcycle. When it is time to sit down and write thank-you notes, we have an irresistible urge to reorganize our closet. When it is time to get back to work on our income tax report, we pick up a six-month-old magazine and read an article on dinosaurs with avid interest.

I am not too much impressed by a person who works hard at a job he likes; what really wins my admiration is when a person is able to do a job he

What really wins my admiration is the person who can do a job he dislikes with cheerfulness and zest if it benefits those around.

dislikes with cheerfulness and zest if it benefits those around him.

How to get going on jobs we dislike

How do we begin a job that we have been putting off, especially one that we have been dreading? A frontal assault is very difficult; even with the best of intentions, we often can't just sit down and start composing the opening paragraph of our long-overdue term paper.

But there is a simple trick that works. Repeat the mantram a few times and take a deep breath; then clear off your desk, sharpen your pencil, pull out the books you need, and spread out your notes as if you were going to get to work. When your mind complains, "I just can't face it," reassure it that you are just going to leaf through the books, sort the notes, and push the pencil around a little.

Then, to play fair and keep your mind at ease, you do just that. Soon, despite your lack of intentions, there is another stray idea; then, as you skim a page, a couple of ideas fall into place, and you read a little further and get a few more ideas and write down some new insights.

Before you know it, you have gotten absorbed in the project: there is enthusiasm, there is a steady flow of ideas, and you are working with real concentration.

You must have noticed how step by step you can get embroiled in little jobs you hadn't set out to do; here, you are putting that same tendency to work for you instead of letting it work against you. This is the way to get the job done; it helps concentration and it strengthens the will.

Give it more attention

It is the quality of the attention we give a job that makes it interesting or not. If we can concentrate fully, we can make almost any job interesting. Full concentration brings relaxation and joy. It is the struggle of divided attention that brings a great deal of the misery that we associate with jobs we don't like.

When the mind is unified and fully employed at a task, we have abundant energy. The work, particularly if routine, is dispatched efficiently and easily, and we see it in the context of the whole into which it fits. We feel engaged; time does not press on us.

5. Learn to drop work at will

The ability to work on a job with total concentration, and then put it out of your mind when necessary, is a skill which can be cultivated.

Boring, or super interesting?

Recently I had to read a scientific study and write about something new to me. Walking to the library, I said the mantram. Then I sat down and tried to give the task my complete attention.

At first, I had to bring back my attention pretty often, because the mind was playing tricks like "You could be doing more pleasant things!" and "Am I up to this?" Every time I did bring my mind back, however, the material I was working on became more interesting. Finally, the study I was reading became super interesting and when it came time to write, it went smoothly.

After that, my concentration was boosted for the rest of the day, including the next meditation.

From a journal reader

Through practice, we can learn to drop whatever we are doing and turn our attention to a more urgent need.

When you are absorbed in a favorite book and your partner interrupts you, set the book aside and give your complete attention to what he or she is saying. If part of your mind is on the conversation and part on what you have been reading, there will be division and tension in the mind.

Similarly, when the day is done, leave your work at the office. Many people who work hard bring their work home with them, yapping like a poodle at their heels. At the dinner table, when they sit thinking about their deadlines and responsibilities, the poodle is nestled under the chair, whining away. They curl up with it at night and dream about reports that haven't been filed, statistics that don't point to the right conclusions, mail that hasn't been responded to or that has been sent out with the wrong memo attached. This is what I mean by bringing the poodle home: it's not just in your briefcase, but in your cranium too.

It takes a lot of control to work with concentration for eight hours and then drop your work at will, but this is one of the greatest skills that

Set a limit

I continue to work on one-pointed attention but especially the “dropping it” part. One way I work on this is to start my computer visits with a time frame — let's say 15 minutes — and drop it when that time is up. It does help loosen up the “drop it muscle” for more difficult times. We are going away for a week and I plan to leave the computer behind as a way to unplug. It helps me to slow down to have a computer-free day as well.

From a journal reader

one-pointed attention can bring. When you enter your office, you give all your attention to your job; once you leave, you put the job out of your mind. This simple skill guards against tension and allows you to give your very best. If you have given your best, there is no need to worry about the results.

6. Keep your attention in the present

If we could watch our thoughts, we would find that instead of being here and now, our attention

Don't think about work in the evening

I'm working on a large project which is on a tight schedule and requires a lot of on-the-job learning. So I'm finding that my mind just wants to think about this big project all the time — working out details, thinking of ideas, figuring out areas that aren't working. I noticed that it has been creeping into my meditation and have decided to take firm steps to keep these thoughts out. I've also realized that my getting entangled in the project will only prevent it getting done well — so my goal is not to let myself get entangled.

Here's what I'm finding helpful: Between finishing my work and breakfast the following day, I drop work and don't let myself think about it. If I have an idea, I remind myself that I'll think about it again in the morning — after breakfast!

In the evening I have found that my mind will come up with an objection to something that happened during the day — perhaps a decision that was made that my mind now finds disagreeable — and the temptation is to vent about it. I've been using the mantram instead and then focusing on another activity, and telling myself I'll bring it up at breakfast if necessary. And interestingly, by breakfast time, the objection just seems to have dissipated!

I am discovering through all this that the project is still being completed on schedule — and I feel refreshed and have a deeper sense that I am not doing my part alone.

From a journal reader

Be More Intentional

I do not own a smartphone, but I can still fritter time and attention away on the internet. I am trying to be more intentional in this area, which for me means getting on the computer for specific tasks, completing those tasks, then getting off. If I'm going to get on Facebook or YouTube, I often give myself a time limit. Also, with e-mail I am trying to limit the number of times I check it each day. Most of the time, it is not necessary to check it more than 2–3 times a day, and often I can get away with once a day. I find that when I'm one-pointed in my internet use, I feel less divided and “speeded-up” internally.

From a journal reader

is constantly wandering everywhere and everywhere else — to the past, to the future, to fantasy lands where reality has never visited. And with every trip, we are training the mind not to remain in the present, but to wander in the past and future as aimlessly as in a dream. Attention is drawn away from the present, which is real, into a time that is not real. The more compelling the memory, the more likely it is that attention will get caught there — which means we have less attention available for real life.

That is why doing one thing at a time is such a powerful way to live completely in the present. If we're hurrying to do several things at once, no one is really there to enjoy the moment. The pleasure an artist finds in nuances of color, a musician's enjoyment of harmonies, comes not from the perceptions but from the capacity to be absorbed. When attention is complete, that capacity comes into every moment. Life's ordinary joys are multiplied a thousand times.

The Power and Peace of Meditation

By Eknath Easwaran

Meditation involves keeping attention on your chosen focus and not letting it wander. In the method I follow, this means going slowly through the words of a passage such as the second chapter of the Gita, trying to give full attention to each word or phrase. Whenever the mind wanders, as the Gita says (6:26), bring it gently back:

Wherever the mind wanders, restless and diffuse in its search for satisfaction without, lead it within; train it to rest in the Self. Abiding joy comes to those who still the mind.

For a long time, it is inevitable that distractions will come in; that is the nature of the mind. It has got to keep moving, from thought to thought, from desire to desire, from feeling to feeling, from memory to memory; that is simply the way it works. We are trying to teach it to stay put, but the problem is that resisting distractions like these as they arise simply gives them more attention and makes them stronger. A more effective strategy is simple: instead of resisting distractions, just give more attention to what you are meditating on.

The yak-yak-yakking of the mind

Actually, in meditation, any kind of discursive thinking is a distraction. No matter what the mind turns to, it is not staying where we put it; it is doing what it wants instead. We call this thinking, but most of the time it is just yak-yak-yakking, the mind talking to itself. As your mind becomes

one-pointed, you will find this kind of thing quite bothersome. For me, this has gone to such an extent that when I go to the movie theater, I like to sit far away from people who bring in those big tubs of popcorn; it reminds me of the mind, munching, munching, munching all the time.

We had a woman in our village who had a genius for discursive thinking. She would talk without a break, jumping from one subject to another almost sentence by sentence — a hundred subjects in the course of one hour. She would ask my mother, “Do you know what happened to Raman?” and by the time my mother could say, “No, what?” she would be talking about Shankaran instead. It was an extreme case of a grasshopper mind.

Problems arise from attention getting caught

Many problems that we take for granted are not really necessary; they arise from attention getting distracted and caught without our consent.

For example, all of us are familiar with the toll negative memories can take. When they come up, they simply won't let us alone. They claim our attention, and dwelling on them only makes them stronger. The mind gets upset until finally the body begins to suffer. But if you can turn attention away, just as you do in meditation, the memory will gradually lose its emotional charge. The memory itself is not lost; it simply loses its compulsive hold on you.

Again, when a friend has offended you, it is not your friend that causes the agitation; it is dwelling on what happened. Attention is caught, and the mind cannot stop thinking about it. When you go to the theater, you can't pay attention to the

film. When you go to bed, you can't stop thinking about what happened, so you toss and turn all night. Dwelling on resentment or hostility or any other negative emotion magnifies it; the answer is to turn attention away.

Happiness comes when we forget ourselves, and misery when we can't think about anybody else. This is essentially a problem of attention getting trapped. One of the greatest benefits of meditation is that it releases the precious faculty of redirecting our love and attention from our little selves so it can flow towards other people. It's an exhilarating experience, because most of us have no idea of the capacity for love we have imprisoned.

Just half angry

You can get a glimpse of how powerful a distracted mind can be by seeing how it can affect others. Haven't you seen people who, when something happens to them, take it out on their partner, their children, their colleagues, even their dog? All right, the Gita would say, you had a mishap, but confine it to your own lane. Why weave off into other people's lanes and cause collisions there too?

Meditation is getting behind the wheel and getting the mind under control. At first we may not be able to stay in the same lane all the time; we still get angry or afraid. But instead of getting really angry, we'll get half angry — instead of throwing things, we'll be able to take them up, make a gesture, and then put them down. It's a beginning. Gradually we reach the point where the mind is tuned like a Ferrari and completely under our control. Then we set out for our destination

Happiness is essentially a matter of attention.

If you can turn attention away, negative memories will lose their emotional charge.

and cruise along in one lane — unbroken, effort-
less concentration. Distractions may be weaving
about, trying to get our attention, but that doesn't
mean we have to look.

Waves of emotion

Sometimes, waves of emotion can sweep over us
in meditation. This too is a distraction: not always
negative, but a distraction nevertheless. We are
letting the mind grab the wheel. The emotion
might be fear; it might be a profound catharsis
that brings a flood of tears. At other times a great
wave of love or gratitude may threaten to over-
whelm us. Whatever comes, that is the time to
concentrate more and not pay attention to the
emotion by trying to analyze it or bask in it. When
we are able to concentrate even more on the
passage during a wave of emotion, concentration
is strengthened enormously, bringing great bene-
fits during the rest of the day — and protecting us
from the inevitable emotional plunge when the
mind swings the other way.

Power rising

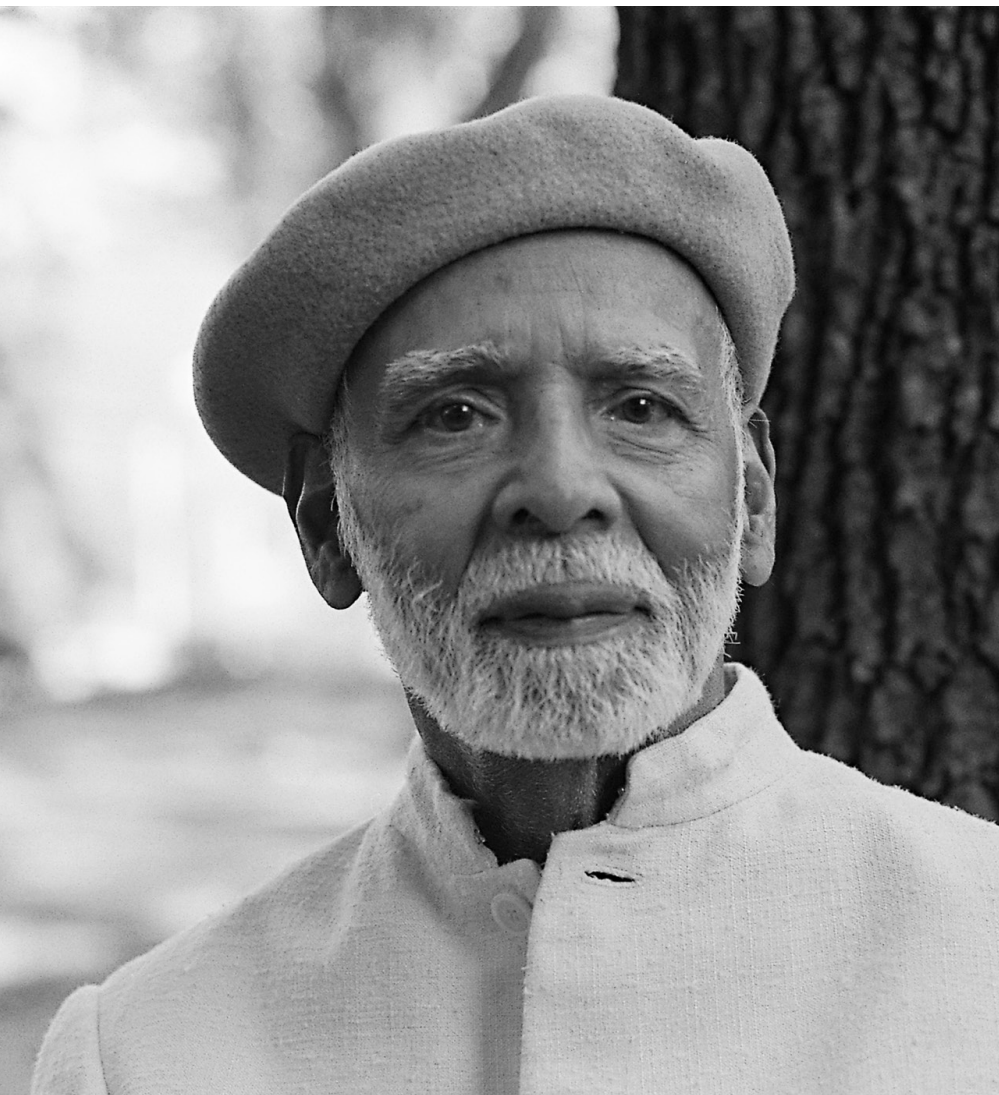
Training the mind like this in meditation calls for
immense patience, but with practice, the great
day will come when the mind does not wander
at all. Attention becomes like a powerful search-
light, which you can turn inward to see fathoms
deep into your consciousness. Then, when you
encounter injustice — when people are exploited,
when children are neglected or mistreated, when
little nations are manipulated by more powerful
ones — you will witness a deep disturbance where
your consciousness is stirred, where power is
rising by which that wrong can be righted.

Everywhere, by not letting the mind get pulled
and pushed about by circumstances, you are
making yourself unshakable — less and less
fickle, and therefore more and more real, because
what is real never changes. When concentration
is complete like this, personal sorrow comes to
an end.

But when you move amidst the world of
sense, free from attachment and aversion
alike, there comes the peace in which all
sorrows end, and you live in the wisdom of
the Self. (Gita 2:64)



At a Young Adult
retreat.



Instruments of Peace

In the Truman Museum in Independence, Missouri, I saw an ancient clay lamp that had been presented to President Truman by the Jewish community of Boston. At its base was an inscription from Proverbs that is well known in English: “The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord.”

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

That is how the mind should be: like the flame of a lamp in a windless place. It should not even flicker. When the mind does not flicker, there can be no fear. When the mind does not flicker, there can be no anger. All negative emotions are wild movements in the mind that vanish when the mind is still. In this state, we find the fulfillment of the wonderful prayer of Saint Francis: “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.”

Carson

We start the spiritual life wherever we are, not running away from society, but right in the midst of life. – Eknath Easwaran

Bringing Meditation to the Web

This year the BMCM has been developing new online resources to reach everyone in our world-wide community right where they are, in the midst of life. Two resources are highlighted here, with more on www.easwaran.org.

Introductory Meditation Webinar:

October 4th, 2014 at 7am PST

In January 2014 we held our first introductory webinar with over 400 participants from over 20 countries.

On October 4, 2014, we will hold the webinar again, sharing everything that's needed to begin practicing meditation. There will be real-life stories of how meditation works in everyday life, video clips of Easwaran, a chance to practice meditation briefly, and Q&A. No previous experience in meditation, or webinars, is required: www.easwaran.org/webinar

“I was first introduced to Easwaran’s book *Meditation* in the late 1990s. A personal crisis got me thinking seriously about meditation again early this year, and when I saw a message about the January webinar, I signed up. That was the beginning of a consistent daily practice, a June retreat, and a visit to the local satsang.”

– A webinar participant

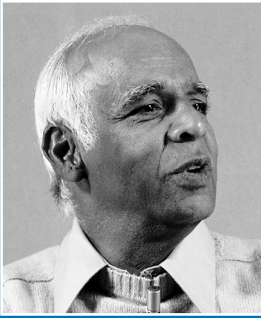


YA Blog: YAmeditation.org

We have just celebrated the one-year anniversary of our young adult (YA) blog, which features posts from our vibrant, worldwide community of young adults in their late teens, twenties, and thirties. The blog includes selections from Easwaran that particularly appeal to this age group. New and longtime meditators of all ages will find resources, tips, and inspiration in these weekly posts.

“As an elder in your midst (and the mother of a YA), I draw inspiration from the stories, comments and concerns of you young ones. It gives me hope that the next generation is benefiting and deepening from this practice, offering fresh ideas, and spreading the wealth to all who come in contact with you. You are a source of joy.”

– A YA blog reader



We Live Where Our Attention Is

If attention wanders all over the map, our lives cannot help being scattered, shallow, and confused. By contrast, complete concentration is the secret of genius in any field.

— Eknath Easwaran

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