



# Blue Mountain

ESTABLISHED BY EKNATH EASWARAN  
FOR PRESENTING HIS EIGHT-POINT  
PROGRAM OF PASSAGE MEDITATION

EKNATH  
EASWARAN

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

## The Power of the Mantram

By Eknath Easwaran

**O**N FESTIVAL days in India you will often see a huge elephant, caparisoned in gold and gorgeous cloth, carrying an image of the Lord on its back through the village streets. Everyone enjoys the sight: the musicians with their drums and cymbals in front, then the beast slowly lumbering along and the devotees behind, all on their way to the temple.

But there can be one difficulty. Stalls of fruits, vegetables, and sweets line the narrow, crooked streets, and the trunk of an elephant, as you may know, rarely stays still. It sways back and forth, up and down, constantly. So when the procession comes abreast of a fruit stall, the elephant seizes a shelled coconut or two, opens his cavernous mouth, and tosses them in. At another stall the big fellow twists his trunk round a bunch of bananas suspended from the roof. The mouth opens again, the whole bunch goes in with a thud . . . you hear a gulp . . . and that's the end of it.

The humble people who own these stalls cannot afford this kind of loss, and to prevent it the man in charge, the mahout, asks the elephant to grasp a firm bamboo shaft in his trunk. Though not sure why, the elephant, out of love for his mahout, does as he is told. Now the procession can pass safely through the streets. The elephant steps right along with his stick held upright in a steady trunk, not tempted to feast on mangoes or melons because he has something to hold on to.

The human mind is rather like the trunk

of an elephant. It never rests . . . it goes here, there, ceaselessly moving through sensations, images, thoughts, hopes, regrets, impulses. Occasionally it does solve a problem or make necessary plans, but most of the time it wanders at large, simply because we do not know how to keep it quiet or profitably engaged.

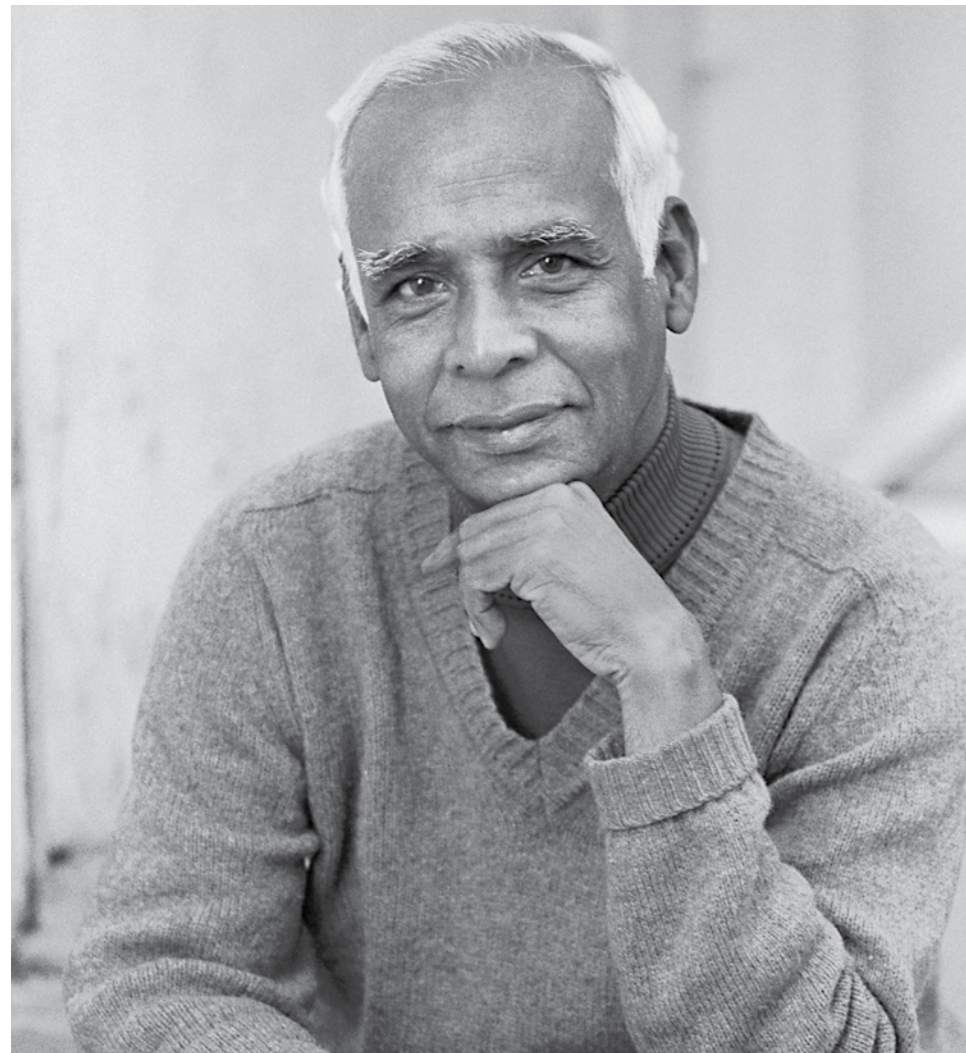
But what should we give it to hold on to? For this purpose I recommend the systematic repetition of the mantram, which can steady the mind at any time and in any place.

### What is a mantram?

Of late, the ancient word *mantram* (or the familiar variant *mantra*) has

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*From our archives: Eknath Easwaran, 1973.*



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BLUE MOUNTAIN

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

*Christine Easwaran*

*Post Office Box 256*

*Tomales, CA 94971*

*Telephone 707 878 2369*

*Facsimile 707 878 2375*

*Email info@easwaran.org*

*Web www.easwaran.org*

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What can we give the restless mind to hold on to? Eknath Easwaran explains and illustrates how the mantram can steady the mind during the challenges of the day.

### 5 Giving and Forgiving with the Mantram

Continuing a theme from our last issue, Easwaran emphasizes that meditation alone is not enough to keep the mind calm: "You can make great progress during a morning's meditation only to see it all undone at the breakfast table." The mantram plays an essential role in helping us "give and forgive" throughout the day.

### 8 "I Use the Mantram to . . ."

How do you use the mantram? Readers share some stories.

### 10 The Mantram: Questions & Answers

Probably everyone in the modern world has questions about the mantram as Easwaran presents it. How can it possibly work the way he claims? In this section we give his answers to some of the questions most frequently asked.

**The Blue Mountain Center of Meditation** offers instruction in meditation and allied living skills, following the eight-point program of passage meditation developed by Sri Eknath Easwaran. The approach is nondenominational, nonsectarian, and free from dogma and ritual. It can be used within each person's own cultural and religious background to relieve stress, heal relationships, release deeper resources, and realize one's highest potential.

### Passage Meditation: An Eight-Point Program

#### 1. MEDITATION ON A PASSAGE

Silent repetition in the mind of memorized inspirational passages from the world's great religions. Practiced for one-half hour each morning.

#### 2. REPETITION OF A MANTRAM

Silent repetition in the mind of a Holy Name or a hallowed phrase from one of the world's great religions. Practiced whenever possible throughout the day or night.

#### 3. SLOWING DOWN

Setting priorities and reducing the stress and friction caused by hurry.

#### 4. ONE-POINTED ATTENTION

Giving full concentration to the matter at hand.

#### 5. TRAINING THE SENSES

Overcoming conditioned habits and learning to enjoy what is beneficial.

#### 6. PUTTING OTHERS FIRST

Gaining freedom from selfishness and separateness; finding joy in helping others.

#### 7. SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP

Spending time regularly with other passage meditators 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.

### Eknath Easwaran

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

*The Blue Mountain Center depends on donations to carry on its work. Every gift, large or small, is much appreciated and put to good use. The Center is a 501(c)(3) California nonprofit corporation; contributions are deductible from state and federal income tax.*

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## Choosing a Mantram



Christine Easwaran

**I**N THIS issue we take up the second point in Eknath Easwaran's eight-point program of passage meditation: Repetition of a Mantram.

Traditionally, spiritual aspirants are given a mantram by their teacher. Easwaran's way was a bit different: he gave a selection of mantrams sanctified by the world's great religions and let his students choose.

Frequently, this led to misunderstanding. If I am free to choose, may I pick a mantram not on your list? May I make up my own? In these pages, Easwaran explains repeatedly why he considered it so important to select a mantram that has been sanctified by generations of devoted use.

Those of us who were with him in those years know that on rare occasions, in person, he would allow a student to use an unorthodox mantram. Such exceptions were meant for that student alone. To those who come to learn his program today, we can only repeat the instructions he gave over and over throughout the decades he was with us: Choose a mantram from the list; if in doubt, choose your teacher's mantram or Mahatma Gandhi's: *Rama, Rama, Rama*. As he often assured us, "You can never go wrong with *Rama*."

*Christine Easwaran*

Christine Easwaran

For the Board of Trustees

### Mantrams Recommended by Sri Eknath Easwaran

#### B U D D H I S T

*Om mani padme hum*  
("The jewel in the lotus of the heart")

*Namu Amidabutsu*  
("I put my faith in the Buddha of infinite light")

#### C H R I S T I A N

*Jesus, Jesus*

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me*  
(The Jesus Prayer)

*Kyrie eleison or Gospodi pomilui*  
("Lord have mercy"; short form of the Jesus Prayer in Greek & Russian)

*Ave Maria or Hail Mary*

*Deus meus et omnia or My God and my all*  
(Repeated by St. Francis; use either Latin or English)

*Om Yesu Christu*

#### H I N D U

*Rama, Rama*

*Haré Rama, Haré Rama, Rama Rama, Haré Haré,*  
*Haré Krishna, Haré Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Haré Haré*

*Om Sri Ram, jai Ram, jai jai Ram*

*Om namah Shivaya*

*Om Bhavani*  
(A mantram in honor of the Divine Mother)

#### J E W I S H

*Barukh attah Adonai* ("Blessed art thou, O Lord")

*Ribono shel olam* ("Lord of the universe")

#### M U S L I M

*Allah, Allah*

*Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim*  
("In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate")



Continued from page 1 had considerable exposure on talk shows and in the Sunday supplements. To many it may conjure up an exotic image of flowing robes, garlands, and incense. It may seem to be something impractical and otherworldly, perhaps a bit magical and mysterious. Actually, just the opposite holds true. The mantram – under other names, to be sure – has been known in the West for centuries, and there need not be anything secret or occult about it. The mantram stands open to all. And since it can calm our hearts and minds, it is about as practical as anything can be.

The mantram is a short, powerful spiritual formula for the highest power that we can conceive of – whether we call it God, or the ultimate reality, or the Self within. Whatever name we use, with the mantram we are calling up what is best and deepest in ourselves. The mantram has appeared in every major spiritual tradition, West and East, because it fills a deep, universal need in the human heart.

Select a mantram that appeals to you. Every religious tradition has a mantram, often more than one. But you needn't subscribe to any religion to benefit from the mantram – you simply have to be willing to try it.

### “I think it works!”

If you have preconceptions about using a mantram, let me ask you to put them aside and give it a personal trial. Why take someone else's word for it? Enter the laboratory of your mind and perform the experiment. Then you will be in a position to judge for yourself, and nothing can be as persuasive as that.

If you're like me, at this point you may doubt that such a simple skill could do what I claim.

I doubted it, too, when my grandmother tried to tell me what the mantram can do. Granny was the wisest person I have ever known, and I loved her passionately, so I always took her advice seriously. But, after all, grandnies don't know everything. “Granny,” I protested, “that's just mindless repetition! What can repetition do?”

“Walking is just repetition too,” she said. “One step after another, each one the same.”

She had me there. But I still didn't believe her.

But life went on presenting challenges, and in college I encountered a really intimidating one: public speaking. I found the activity fascinating and took every opportunity to learn, but no matter how many times I stood before an audience and lived to tell the

tale, I was always afraid that on the next occasion I would trip on my way to the podium or open my mouth and find that no words would come out.

When I confessed this fear to my granny, she had a very simple piece of advice: not to sit there going over my notes or trying to size up my audience, but to repeat the mantram to myself quietly while awaiting my turn.

I decided she didn't really understand. After all, she never had to give a speech! But because of my love for her, I promised to give it a try.

The next time I had to give a talk, I sat quietly repeating *Rama, Rama, Rama* over and over and over in my mind. Whenever my thoughts tried to blurt out “I'm afraid! I'm afraid!” instead, I would bring them back to “*Rama, Rama*” – adding to myself, every now and then, “I hope it works.”

And the talk went well. With my mind calmer, the words came up right on cue.

I kept on practicing this little trick, and after a while I began to say, “*Rama, Rama, Rama* . . . I think it works!”

Today, after years of practice, I can assure you with complete confidence that I know it works. This is really the only way that trust in the mantram can come – through your own personal experience. ☺

*Walking with the mantram, Dillon Beach, 1977. “By now there are more mantrams on this beach than grains of sand.”*



# Giving and Forgiving with the Mantram

**I**T 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.

But meditation alone is not enough. You can make great progress during a morning's meditation only to see it all undone at the breakfast table, when someone admits to having dented a fender slightly or overdrawn the checking account. To hold on to the precious advances you make in meditation and to extend the effects of meditation into the rest of the day, you need to practice certain supporting disciplines as well.

The first of these is the use of the holy name, called the mantram in Sanskrit. Meditation is going inside to pay a formal visit to the Lord who lives in the depths of consciousness: you sit down and politely give him your undivided attention. Repeating the mantram, by contrast, is quite informal, though never casual. There are times throughout the day and night when you need to draw on the Lord for love or wisdom or strength, and you need to do it right now,

regardless of where you are or what you are doing. You're not paying a visit in person; you can't even afford the price of a phone call. Instead, you're calling the Lord collect. A wave of fear or anger is about to overtake you, or a great wave of selfish desire, and you just go out for a brisk walk repeating *Jesus, Jesus, Jesus* in your mind. The rhythm of your breathing will blend with the rhythm of your footsteps. Soon you will find that the rhythm of your mind has slowed down too, and its turbulence has subsided.

The power of this simple discipline

*There are times when you need to draw on the Lord for strength right now.*

has been laid out eloquently by the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*:

... a naked intent directed unto God, without any other cause than himself, sufficeth wholly. And if thou desirest to have this intent lapped and folden in one word, so that thou mayest have better hold thereupon, take thee but a little word of one syllable, for so it is better than two; for the shorter the word, the better it accordeth with the work of the spirit. ...

And fasten this word to thy heart that so it may never go thence for anything that befalleth. This word shall be thy shield and thy spear, whether thou ridest on peace or on war. With this word thou shalt beat on this cloud and this darkness above thee. With this word thou shalt smite down all manner of thought under the cloud of forgetting; insomuch that if any thought press upon thee to ask what thou wouldst have, answer with no more than this one word.

When people say or do harmful things to you, you can almost see the cloud of darkness forming across your mind. It is this cloud that covers over your need to give and forgive, and it can seem as thick as a great thunderhead. But with the mantram you can just beat on that cloud until you disperse it and drive it away, and there behind it, shining like the sun, is the capacity to forgive others and draw them closer to you. It isn't always that you forget the wrongs that have been done or said, but there is no longer any emotional charge.

## Learning to forgive

In the Hindu tradition, one of the names of the Lord is "the ocean of forgiveness."

If we want to be united with him, we need to forgive all those around us, for in learning to forgive we move closer and closer to the Lord, who is the source of forgiveness itself.

When you begin to travel inward through meditation, you will see for yourself how many things the mind has not been able to pardon. For a while, all you can do is look at them in dismay. But if over many years you have developed compassion for others, then that same wealth of compassion will come to you when you most need it. It will equip you with a kind of spiritual eraser. Now you will be able to walk up to a memory that has spread hostility, fear, or greed in your mind for decades and just rub it out.

If anyone were to ask me about the mistakes I made in the past, I would say simply, "That was how I saw life then. Now, through the grace of the Lord, my vision has been corrected." That is why I repeat over and over again, "Don't let your mind dwell on the past." Everybody has scars from the past. Don't talk about them;

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don't think about them.

I am the first to admit that this is a tall order. It can be done, though, through repetition of the holy name.

Our best defense against the fast thinking that plunges us into anger is the holy name – particularly when it is combined with a really fast walk. In India, some of these essential strategies of the spiritual life are handed out with a delightfully light touch in a little story. One such story concerns a wandering sage who was asked by a villager what to do about anger. “That’s simple,” the sage said. “Whenever you get angry, just get outside and walk as fast as you can, repeating to yourself the holy name: *Rama, Rama, Rama.*”

Time passed, and it was months before the sage’s wanderings led him to that village again. His disciple ran to greet him, but the sage could hardly recognize him. He looked calm and secure but exceptionally fit as well, strong and bronzed by the sun. “I’m glad to see you looking so well!” the sage exclaimed. “What is the secret of your good health?”

“Oh,” the man answered with an embarrassed smile, “I’ve been living mostly in the open.”

### Healing the wounds of the day

The most precious period of the day for repeating your mantram is at night, just as you are falling asleep. Between the last waking moment and the first sleeping moment, there is an infinitesimally narrow tunnel into the unconscious. If you can learn to fall asleep in the holy name, you can send it in deep where it will heal the wounds the day has inflicted; it will soothe the raw edges of daily experience. The proof that the holy name is doing its work is that sometimes you may hear it reverberating in your sleep.

This is the miracle St. Paul refers to when he enjoins us to “pray without

ceasing.” It goes on wherever you are, whatever you are doing, protecting your mind against any negative emotion. In fact, I like to compare the holy name to a highway patrolman riding about on a Harley-Davidson, round and round the alleys of the mind – most of them blind. He keeps an eye on the thoughts traveling there and

## *The most precious time for repeating your mantram is just as you are falling asleep.*

gives out tickets for excessive speed, for drifting back and forth across lanes, for driving too close to the car ahead. Day and night, your mantram is always on duty.

### Making progress as we sleep

Increasingly as we grow older, sleep can become problematic. Old memories come to stalk us; fears and resentments come to nibble at our security. Sleep may be a long time coming, and when it comes it is often shattered by unpleasant dreams. Small wonder that people spend five hundred million dollars each year on sleeping pills. Small wonder they come to dread going to bed at night.

But the great mystics speak very differently of both sleep and sleeplessness. The German mystic Angelus Silesius wrote in beautiful, enigmatic language: “The light of splendor shines in the middle of the night. Who can see it? A heart which has eyes and watches.”

Of course, the light he is describing is not physical, and the night is not only the stretch of time between sunset and sunrise. What you are doing in meditation is trying to make the unconscious conscious: to travel deep into the dark realms of the unconscious and set them ablaze with spiritual awareness. You do this in a small

way each time you meditate, but you also enter the unconscious when you go to sleep at night, and one of the remarkable discoveries you will make as your meditation deepens is that you can make considerable progress during your sleep. Later on, in fact, some of the most thrilling experiences to come your way are likely to take place not during meditation and not during the day, but in the middle of the night.

### A bedtime sequence

This is why I place so much emphasis on a simple bedtime sequence that everyone can fol-

low with benefit, whether their desire is for spiritual awareness or just the blessed gift of a sound night’s sleep. First, put away your Agatha Christie or John Le Carré. The last things you read about, or think about, or see on television, will follow you into your sleep and color your dreams.

Second, spend fifteen minutes to half an hour reading something of genuine inspirational value – ideally, works from the great mystical traditions. (Dame Agatha Christie would very likely agree with this advice: a friend told me recently that Miss Marple herself always read a few lines from Thomas à Kempis before bedtime.) When you have finished, turn off your light and begin repeating your mantram, giving it all the attention you can, and keep repeating it until you fall asleep.

To do this is much harder than it sounds. It is terribly difficult, in fact, because the period just before sleep is like listening in on a party line. Someone is talking on one line about the happenings of the day, while on another a voice keeps harping on your mistakes and shortcomings, and still a third is chattering away about tomorrow. To keep your attention on the holy name when all this is going on is hard, hard work. For many nights, you may not be falling asleep in your mantram at all; you’ll be drifting off into your own



thoughts. If this happens, don't get discouraged; be patient and keep on trying.

When you have learned to fall asleep in the mantram, you may sometimes hear it in your sleep. When a nightmare is slowly tiptoeing in, the mantram will reverberate and the nightmare will vanish. All night long the name of the Lord can go on echoing, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus," and as it does, old wounds are healed and long-standing conflicts are resolved. Diffidence gives way to confidence, and despair to faith.

### Relieving others' pain

The holy name reverberating in the depths of consciousness transfigures our entire vision of life. Whether our mantram is *Rama, Rama* or *Jesus, Jesus* or *Hail Mary* or *Om mani padme hum*, it fills us with the same joy, security, and beauty. Just as the mantram transforms negative forces in consciousness into constructive power, so it now transforms all our perceptions of the everyday world into unbroken awareness of the unity of life.

When spiritual teachers talk about meditation, they often speak of putting an end to sorrow. It is easy to misunderstand this. "Don't you feel any grief, then?" I am sometimes asked. And of

course I do. It is not that I do not feel pain; but the pain that is in my heart today comes of seeing the pain of others. All my capacity for sorrow, which I used to waste on myself, has been turned into compassion. And the joy that comes of being able to relieve pain never goes away. In the deepest stages of meditation, when I became aware

*The name of the Lord heals your wounds, sets your mind at rest, lets you sleep in peace.*

that everybody's suffering is mine and that I had developed a capacity to help, I began to find an unlimited joy.

As a child I had always been sensitive to suffering, but whenever I asked myself what I could do to relieve suffering around me, the answer had always been, "Nothing. You're too small." But my capacity to feel suffering grew with deepening meditation, little by little. And my desire to relieve suffering kept deepening with my capacity to feel it. Today I know that once a person becomes one with the Lord, he or she feels the suffering of all. Yet there is a simultaneity of suffer-

ing and joy, far beyond the duality of pleasure and pain. When there is great pain, when there is great grief – physical, emotional and, of course, spiritual – I can attest to you from my own personal life that the repetition of the name of the Lord heals your wounds, sets your mind at rest, lets you sleep in peace. Now I am prepared to face

any amount of pain, because the Lord has granted me the immense desire to relieve the suffering of others.

### Serving the Lord everywhere

When we change our way of seeing – when, after years of spiritual striving, we begin to see with the eyes of love – we will live in a different world.

If we give others deep respect and trust, and bear all suffering with patience and internal toughness, we will find ourselves in a compassionate universe. The eyes of love see the core of goodness in the hearts of others, and that is how I see the world today. It is not that I fail to see suffering and sorrow. But I understand the laws of life and see its unity everywhere. All I ask is that I may ever see this vision, and ever serve the Lord of Love in every living creature. ⇨

*Walking with the mantram, Dillon Beach, 1977.*



## “I Use the Mantram to . . .”

### Stay calm in a line

When I am really frustrated or in a line or something, I don't let that bother me; I just say my mantram and before you know it, I am right up at the front of the line. It has really worked for me. I liked it. I really, really liked it.

### Exercise a little longer

I use it sometimes when I'm on the treadmill at the gym. When I'm wishing that the time would go a little faster. And I'll just start using my mantram and then I forget about it and it helps me exercise a little longer.

### Choose not to worry

My mind has a great ability to be creative. When it is directed, my imagination is a very helpful asset. Undirected it can, and does, go awry. Also I am a master of worry.

Seven days a week my work at the farm begins with the same routine chores (which I do enjoy – both the routine and the chores). But as all routines can do, this awakens my wandering mind, which so often will tend towards worry. For me, my mantram has become a stop sign and can halt this thought pattern as soon as I call on it. I am so thankful for this tool, the mantram.

A few weeks ago my mind was going through the same course: routine chores, worry, thought – halt – mantram, refocus on chores and the joy in these chores. But this day I held on to my mantram a lot longer and I made a very obvious discovery. I was choosing to worry. Why not choose a direction of positive possibilities?

Now when I start to worry, quicker than before I go to my mantram.

### Clear the clouds

When I was working at a consulting job that was very high-pressure and that I had never felt comfortable or happy with, I felt very trapped and unhappy. After one discussion, in which it was very clear to me that I would have to stay in the company, I was sitting in the car feeling angry and frus-

trated, but fairly mechanically repeating the mantram. Suddenly I started to feel a little better, like clouds clearing. My first thought was, NO! I don't want to feel better; I want to make everybody else miserable! That thought was so ridiculous, even I had to laugh.

### Keep the mind present

I'm in the Peace Corps, and yesterday I decided to go to a town about 45 minutes on foot from my house to attempt to start a new youth group through their church. I was quite nervous as I walked the 45 minutes to town. Imagine being a gringo walking into a town with no connections, little Spanish, and trying to start a sustainable youth group! As I walked I repeated rama, rama, rama with every footstep while trying to keep my mind present and remain confident.

When I arrived, the high school was outside doing P.E. I spoke briefly with the teacher about who I was, and what I was hoping to achieve. He was a little confused seeing a gringo just stroll into town out of nowhere but he said I could talk with his classes if I wanted. So he called them all over. Three classes, 70 students were surrounding me, rama, rama rama. I introduced myself and asked them if they were interested in starting a group to learn English and do sports. They were very receptive and we set up a date.

Then the teacher asked me to do some games right then and there. I hadn't prepared anything and my Spanish was really failing me, rama rama rama, but I wanted to make a good impression so I stumbled through three games for over an hour with them. By the end of the time I was a town hero. The whole town practically had come down to see the crazy gringo running around yelling and being silly.

When it was time for me to return to my village I was so elated my head was spinning. As I walked the 45 minutes home I repeated the mantram to calm down my elated mind.

### Stave off a tantrum

My mantram saved me from a temper tantrum



recently. My co-worker read mail I'd sent to someone else and I got mad. I was working up to a small tantrum in front of other people when I realized I didn't want to waste my energy on anger or embarrass myself by getting angry in public. "My God, my all, my God, my all!" put it all into perspective and calmed me down. The mantram really works!

### Deal with fear

At some point in the early 90s, as a result of seeing several scary airplane crash movies, I became very scared of flying. Not so scared that I couldn't get on a plane to go somewhere, but scared enough to have sweaty palms, nausea, and plenty of anxious thoughts.

This was a situation that definitely needed the mantram, but it wasn't until much later that I was using a mantram and recognized this opportunity.

Today I cling to the mantram during take off, landings, turbulence, odd noises, and even while just cruising comfortably. I believe using my mantram during these times of intense fear has helped to drive the mantram deeper into my consciousness and has made it possible for me to be able to fly with less anxiety. I still get scared, but the mantram helps me to bear with the situation.

The truth of it is, that every time I fly, the scared part of me is coming face to face with my fear of death. After having many opportunities to repeat my mantram when I fly, I'm seeing how my thinking regarding this fear has started to change when I'm flying. It's starting to shift from "God, please don't let me die, I'm not ready to die yet" to "God, may we all arrive safely at our destination today. But if for some reason we don't, help me to keep repeating your name and go straight to you if my time is up."

This is a huge change in my perspective. I'm not free of the fear . . . but I'm seeing how well the mantram works in dealing with it.

### Stay calm in meetings

I work in a large hospital where we are currently having regular internal meetings to discuss some organisational changes which have been proposed.

The meetings can be quite tense – people hold strong views about the way in which work is carried out. I've found writing the mantram during the meeting to be a great help in staying calm and detached. The only difficult moment was when someone who had attended the meeting was unable to recall a particular point and asked me to show him my written minutes! My close colleagues have commented on the change in my behavior, and have become a little intrigued about the eight point program. . . .

### Blow nightmares away

For a couple of years after the war, I wasn't able to sleep except in fits and starts. The same nightmares would always come and I'd wake up in a cold terror, sweating and shaking all over. I was afraid to go to sleep.

Finally a doctor told me about the mantram. I was skeptical, but hey – no side effects, and I was desperate. I especially glommed onto the idea that if I could fall asleep in the mantram, it would go on healing even in my sleep. But when I tried, I couldn't manage to hold on to it and the nightmares would still come.

I got angry. I thought, "You're a Marine! You can stay cool under fire; why can't you do this?" So I decided I wasn't going to sleep unless it was with the mantram. That night I didn't go to bed; I just sat up in a chair repeating the mantram. I decided that was my job: not to sleep but to say the mantram.

Finally I must have dozed off, because I remember feeling that old fear that the nightmare was about to start up again. But that same moment, the mantram started echoing in my mind. It just blew everything else away. I woke up with my heart pounding, but this time it wasn't with fear. I guess I could call it gratitude. I was stark wide awake and at peace. I finally felt for the first time that I'd be okay.

The old memories still come, but they're getting weaker. I'm not afraid of the past any more. I think I've fallen asleep in the mantram every night since then, because it's there in the morning when I wake up. ☺

# The Mantram: Questions & Answers

By Eknath Easwaran

*Why do you say we can choose our mantram, but only from your list?*

USUALLY WE RECEIVE the mantram from our teacher, who has a rough idea of what our inner need is. The mantram has to fit your mind exactly, but very few of us, when starting out, have any idea what this means.

In many of the Indian traditions, the mantram is a secret between the teacher and the student. You are not supposed to tell anyone what your mantram is. Some people respond to that, and I have no quarrel with it whatever. But I belong to another tradition, which I call the tradition of the open hand: I say, "These are the great mantrams; you choose." I like the intelligent cooperation of the student, and I try to help those who come to me to make a wise choice. The mantram still comes from me, but you can make your own choice.

In choosing, however, please don't go by whether it sounds nice or it "feels right." That is not the issue. Has it been honored by time, practiced by millions? Does your teacher give it? There are certain requirements for a mantram of which most people are not aware. That is why I limit the mantrams in my books to a very few chosen ones that can always be trusted because they are universal, applicable to all countries and to all people. They come to us already surcharged with energy.

The mantram should carry the power of many centuries of people who have used the mantram and benefitted by it. That is how the mantram becomes holy. *Rama*, for example, has been used as a mantram for thousands of years. The name of Jesus has been repeated as a mantram and hallowed by millions of Christians down the centuries. A mantram draws its power from the long procession of religious people who have used it. That's why when you make up your own mantram, it has no power: the power comes from the source.

Most important, you should receive the mantram "hot," from someone who has verified it in his or her personal experience. My own mantram – *Hare Rama, Hare Krishna* – is important for me not only because it has been used for thousands of years in India, but because I received it scalding hot from my own teacher, my grandmother – so hot that I cannot hold it at all; I've got to pass it on to everybody.

*What do you mean by someone "verifying" a mantram?*

THE MANTRAM SHOULD bear the imprint of the spiritual awareness of the person giving it – someone who has brought it to life in his or her own consciousness. The stamp of this experience shows in everything they say and do. The great mystics whose history has come down to us tell us they have seen Rama, the reality indicated by the mantram, in the depths of consciousness. They have seen Krishna, the reality indicated by the mantram. They have seen Jesus, indicated by the Jesus Prayer. These are direct experiences of the same reality.

*Can I make up a mantram from holy words? Wouldn't that have the same power?*

QUITE A NUMBER of people have asked me this. They say, "I have made

up this mantram; what do you think of it? 'I love God, I love God, I love God.'" Well, pretty good statement, but not quite a mantram. I usually say, "Are you an illumined person?" That is first. Second, "How many millions of devotees have used your mantram?" And third, "Is there anyone who has verified this mantram in the depths of consciousness?" These are the important criteria in the choice of the mantram, which is why I recommend mantrams that are stamped with the spiritual awareness of the world's great teachers.

*Some of the mantrams you recommend don't seem to come from a tradition. For example, St. Francis wouldn't have used the words "My God and my all." Wouldn't he have been praying in Italian?*

I BELIEVE HE ACTUALLY used Church Latin: *Deus meus et omnia*, which is a beautiful mantram that I understand has also been sanctified in other languages, including English, by centuries of repetition by devoted Franciscans around the world. If you like, however, you may regard all the mantrams I recommend as coming from me. You are still getting them hot.

*I have an aversion to all the mantrams you give – in fact, to organized religion generally. Can I still benefit from a mantram?*

MANY PEOPLE TODAY are averse to the religion of their childhood or to organized religion in any form at all. As I understand it, religion is beyond sectarian divisions and dogmas. It is realization of the unity of life. That supreme reality is what all mantrams stand for. All mantrams lead to that reality, and all have come down to us from men and women who have made that discovery themselves. To follow

in their footsteps, there is no need for us to believe in anything; we have simply to trust them enough to make the experiment ourselves.

*Isn't Om a great mantram?  
Can I just say Om?*

**OM** – OR, AS it is sometimes spelled, *aum* – is not really a word, not even a sound in the usual sense. It stands for a primordial vibration which can be experienced in very deep meditation, to which all mantrams lead. So if you look at some of the great mantrams that have come down to us in India – for example, *Om nama Shivaya*, or *Om Yesu Christu* – you will see that *Om* has been added to one of the names of God or a great incarnation. If you want to use *Om*, that is what I would recommend – but always make sure it is a traditional mantram sanctified by centuries of tradition.

*Are any mantrams more effective than the others? If I choose, say, Rama or Jesus and stick to it, will I also get the benefit that the other mantrams have in them?*

**GENERALLY SPEAKING**, IF a mantram comes out of a holy tradition, I think it is a good choice. All mantrams will take you to the final goal, as you can experience for yourself. When you have verified the Rama mantram, for example, you know that all mantrams are the same.

Christine and I once met a man from Harvard who had spent about twelve years in an Indian ashram under a Hindu teacher with a Sanskrit mantram. When he finally had the supreme vision, he told us, it was of Jesus the Christ. He couldn't get over it. I said, "It is all the same; only the costume is different." When you finally see the Self, it doesn't matter what religion you belong to, or whether you belong to any religion at all. The Self has no religion. The Self has no color.

The Self has no caste. How you experience the supreme reality depends upon your innermost need. Whether you call on Krishna or Rama or Jesus the Christ, or use the Buddhist mantram *Om mani padme hum*, when the supreme revelation comes, you'll find it is "Ramakrishnajesusbuddha," one divine reality that has all kinds of names.

*Can you have the same mantram as your spiritual teacher?*

**YES**. IN FACT, if you have a teacher, it's traditional to choose your teacher's mantram. But there is actually no obligation to have your teacher's mantram. If you choose a traditional mantram like *Rama, Rama* or the Jesus Prayer or *Om mani padme hum*, it is already surcharged – "batteries included."

*I don't understand why you give the mantram such importance. It seems just mindless repetition.*

**IN THE EARLY** days, when I was more candid, I would say that "mindless repetition" is often what we are pleased to call thinking. The mind just runs along on its own, repeating whatever comes to it. The mantram is *mindful* repetition – and repetition is really the whole point, because you are trying to fill in the gaps in consciousness so that this mindless flow of disjointed thoughts cannot take over.

Repeating the mantram is like walking from one place to another: say, from San Francisco to New York, about three thousand miles. You don't expect to do that without repetition, one step after the next, in order to reach your goal. Repeating the mantram, too, is a journey.

Similarly, the mantram has been called a ladder with billions and billions of steps, rising from earth to heaven. It's sheer repetition, limitless

repetition, but with each repetition you are going somewhere. You are quietening the mind.

When people come to me with a problem that they can't get out of their minds and ask, "What can I do?" I say, "Just repeat the holy name." You can find occasion to repeat it a thousand times every day, ten thousand times every day.

When Christine and I visited Swami Ramdas's ashram in India, we saw how he used writing the mantram in this way. He did not encourage people to talk because he thought most talk about personal problems does not serve any useful purpose. Instead he had a pile of what in India are called exercise books: blank notebooks with lots and lots of pages. When somebody would come to Swami Ramdas with a load of problems, Ramdas would say, "Here is an eighty-page exercise book. You just write *Rama, Rama, Rama, Rama*, fill it up, and bring it to me." It takes a lot of mantrams to fill up an eighty-page exercise book. By the time the person had filled it up, he would come back to Ramdas calmer and more compassionate.

That is the whole point, you see. Problems bother us because they agitate the mind. The problem is not the problem; it is the agitation. And the work of the mantram is to quieten the agitation in the mind.

*Can I sing the mantram? Chant it? Say it aloud?*

**IF YOU ARE** alone, you can repeat the mantram aloud to yourself, especially to get it started if you are agitated. If you are with other people, however, repeating it audibly can be confusing — and if they happen to have a mantram of their own, they are likely to be trying to repeat it themselves. The mantram is always most effective when repeated in the mind.

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In India, as you know, devotional people like to come together to sing songs about the glory of God composed by some of our great mystics. But this is more a spiritual exercise than a musical exercise. It is possible for anyone to sing the mantram beautifully, but that is not its purpose. It is far more important to pay attention to the devotional part of it than the musical part. I remember Mahatma Gandhi, commenting on a distinguished singer in India, saying that there is always a possibility that you may get so absorbed in the music that you forget the devotional aspect of it. There may even come a time when the musical part becomes an impediment on the spiritual path: you may get so attached to the sensual pleasure that you stop there. When you are listening to me singing the mantram, however, I can assure you that this impediment is not there at all.

When Christine and I visited Brindavan, which is sacred to the historic Krishna, we were taken to a place where there were hundreds of women whose only job was to sing the mantram for eight hours every day, from morning till evening, in the implicit belief that anyone who sings the mantram with devotion is helping everyone who hears it too. My way is very different. Here what I encourage is that we repeat the mantram silently in the mind and meditate deeply. If you like, you can always sing the mantram in your mind.

*Can I meditate on the mantram?  
Isn't that done in India?*

**N**OT ONLY IN India, but in other mystical traditions too, the mantram is used for meditation. In my presentation, however, I draw a distinction between meditation on an inspirational passage and repetition of the mantram. To meditate on an inspirational passage, you need to be

seated and bring your concentration on the words of the passage. But the mantram you can repeat at any time that concentration is not required.

Both these disciplines help each other. The more you repeat your mantram, the deeper will be your meditation. The deeper your meditation, the better will be your repetition of the mantram. That is why, in my presentation, meditation and the mantram go together.

In addition, when you are meditating in the morning and again in the evening, repetition of the mantram helps as a kind of connecting thread, using the odd moments of the day.

Of course, this requires taking advantage of every opportunity. I learned to meditate at a great university in India where I had grave responsibilities and a very tight schedule. I learned to pick up every minute like a miser picking up a dime. If I got just two minutes, I would walk and repeat the mantram. And I seldom took part in unnecessary talk; instead I would go sit in a corner, close my eyes, and repeat the mantram. My colleagues thought I was catching forty winks; I was catching forty mantrams.

The reward of all that persistent effort – this is the miracle of my teacher's blessing – is that today I don't have to repeat the mantram. It repeats itself. And when the mantram repeats itself, no negative thought can come in; no wave of anger can enter the mind. That is what everyone should aim at.

*What state of mind are you in  
when the mantram repeats itself  
like that?*

**T**O BE ESTABLISHED in the mantram is samadhi. It is nirvana. In today's world, for the vast majority of ordinary people like us who have so much self-will and have been so thoroughly conditioned by the mass media, I don't think it is possible to

reach this state through repetition of the mantram alone. Even though I was brought up in a good Hindu household at the feet of my spiritual teacher, I didn't have this kind of utter surrender in love to the Lord that is necessary for becoming established in the mantram. That is why I say, based on my own experience, that the regular, sincere, systematic practice of meditation is required.

First and foremost, therefore, please be regular about your meditation. Please be sincere about your practice and make the very best effort in it. Then use every opportunity you have for repeating the mantram.

*I guess I'm just a skeptic. The  
mantram seems so irrational.*

**R**AMANA MAHARSHI USED to say there are two kinds of ignorance. One is plain ignorance, which is easy to dispel. The other is learned ignorance, which is not so easy to dispel. I must confess that I too was a victim of learned ignorance when I started using the mantram. So there is nothing wrong if we start repeating it a little skeptically, but we can treat it as an experiment that each one of us has to conduct for ourselves.

*Why is walking with the  
mantram important?*

**R**HYTHMIC PHYSICAL ACTIVITY helps greatly to get the mantram going and keep it going deeper and deeper, which is especially necessary when dealing with powerful emotions. Then the rhythm of the mantram can combine with the rhythms of a hard, fast walk to steady the rhythms of breathing and thinking, transforming the emotion from negative into positive.

When there are differences at the office, differences at the workplace or at home, that is the best time for repeating the mantram because then you have more power. The negative

emotion can always be used as a heavy hammer to drive the mantram in.

When you are angry, when you are resentful, when you are afraid, when you are greedy, when you are frustrated, please go for a long, fast walk – outside if you can; if necessary, around the block; if you can't even go around the block, walk in the lobby or up and down the stairs. Our bank in Berkeley had a long lobby where one could walk. Most shopping malls are ideal. You will gradually find that a negative emotion gives more power to the repetition of your mantram. Instead of taking away from your peace of mind, it gives you more peace of mind. Instead of minimizing your difficulties, it helps to solve them.

*When you talk about walking fast and timing the mantram with your stride and your*

*breath, do you literally mean we should say it fast?*

**N**O, NO, DON'T say it fast. Say it in rhythm: *Ra-ma, Ra-ma, Ra-ma*, not *Ramramramrammmmma*.

*Is there a difference between "mantram" and "mantra," as it is usually spelled?*

They are the same word. *Mantram* is the neuter form, and that is the traditional way that kind of noun has been taught in India for thousands of years. In modern linguistics, the form used is masculine, *mantra*. There is no difference at all, but since mantra has become so common in phrases like "the Wall Street mantra," I prefer to keep to the form I learned as a child.

*How did you fit in those millions and millions of repetitions? I just can't find time.*

**T**HIS IS WHAT I hear from everybody. I comfort them by saying that's what I used to tell myself. In the early days, I too used to think I didn't have time for repeating the mantram. I was always active, as I still am. I had many, many vital interests, and what little time I had I would give to my students.

But when I began to long for the state where the mantram will begin to repeat itself, I longed for it so much that I worked for it at every possible opportunity. Standing in a queue, riding in a car, walking to the next classroom, waiting at the post office, before a meal, going to sleep – as the bank advertisement says, it all adds up.

But you need to look for opportunities. Many of the occasions when we get bored, for example, it is simply because we don't know how to use the time. Often we make silly statements, indulge

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*On the access road, Ramagiri Ashram, 1995.*



*Continued from previous page* in gossip, do silly things, or offend people with thoughtless words. All this could be saved just by repeating the mantram.

*Isn't it being two-pointed to repeat the mantram while doing something else?*

THE INTELLECT LOVES questions like this, but they tend to fall away when you actually try the mantram. Then you see for yourself that once the mantram catches on, the mind is in focus everywhere.

When walking with the mantram, for example, the mantram actually makes you more wakeful, more alert to what is going on around you. It will heighten your awareness of beauty. Without a mantram, what usually happens is that we get caught listening to our own thoughts, which is never beneficial.

In listening, it is always best to give the other person your full attention. If the conversation provokes so much agitation that this becomes impossible, however, you can always repeat the mantram to quieten the mind down.

A calm mind can listen with some detachment; an agitated mind often isn't really able to listen at all. The words go in one ear and out the other with no effect in between except to make the mind more agitated. At such times you can repeat the mantram until your mind calms down enough to give one-pointed attention again.

Of course, both of these skills – calming the mind with the mantram and giving full attention – will be infinitely easier if you are practicing them at every opportunity during the rest of the day.

*When I'm driving on long stretches of road with little traffic, my mind starts to wander because it has nothing to think about. At such times, can I repeat the mantram?*

WHEREVER YOUR ATTENTION is required, whether it is driving a car, cutting vegetables, or operating power tools, I wouldn't repeat the mantram, nor would I suggest that you repeat the mantram. Give your concentrated attention to driving. Otherwise you're not only risking your life, you're risking the lives of others.

Once somebody persuaded me to

### How Great Is His Name!

If you would have peace,

Seek it in His name.

If you want to see God,

Chant His holy name.

If you wish for freedom and joy,

Find it in His name.

If you aspire for life eternal,

On your tongue have His name.

Name is your path,

Name is your goal;

Name is the means,

Name is the end.

Name is the Truth,

Name is God.

– Swami Ramdas

allow her to repeat the mantram on those long Kansas turnpikes where nothing seems to happen for miles. But I had to retract that statement after watching people drive.

On a long, empty road, nothing seems to happen until suddenly something does – and then, at sixty miles an hour, a split second of inattention is all that is required to cause a terrible accident. Not long ago, very near where we live, two cyclists were killed by a driver who had been taking for granted a long stretch of apparently empty road.

*How about when you're locked in a traffic jam and you aren't going anywhere. Is it all right to say the mantram then?*

I USED TO say that sitting in traffic is a great time for repeating the mantram because you need to stay patient and focused. But even in such circumstances, as a passenger, I have noticed so many unexpected things: a cyclist coming up between vehicles out of nowhere, for example, or a stopped car lurching forward when the driver lets up on a tired foot. Today I say that whatever the situation, being in traffic always requires full attention. This goes for cyclists as well as drivers.

*I have been repeating the mantram for years and it still feels mechanical. It just doesn't seem to work.*

YOU MAY NOT be the best judge. In my experience, when someone says a mantram is not working, it usually means that the person using it has not been working.

I used to get this question often in the early days. I would reply, "The mantram works. It will work for you if you do more work yourself." The more you put into it, the greater the benefit you will receive.

For example, when unwanted desires come – as they will to all of us – people sometimes ask why the mantram doesn't keep those thoughts out the way I describe. The answer is that the mantram is just sitting on the couch and saying quietly, "Please go away." Who hears? The mantram should leap to its feet and get to the door before the distraction can even knock. It doesn't need to be violent. It's very gentle, but it is very persistent. It simply blocks the entrance and sends the distracting thought on its way.

But for that to happen, we have to get the mantram off the couch. ⇨





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A photograph of a forest path with tall redwood trees and people walking. The path is made of wooden planks and is surrounded by lush green foliage and towering redwood trunks. Three people are walking along the path, and the scene is bathed in natural light filtering through the trees.

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