



# 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.*

## Learning to Swim

**M**Y FRIENDS' children have been learning to swim, and throughout the summer I received glowing reports about how well they were doing. At the beginning, I remember, the children themselves turned in a very different story. "Just looking at all that water makes me scared," they told me. "I'll never be able to swim!" They believed that, and they acted on it. When their parents drove them into town for lessons, there was wailing and gnashing of teeth all along the road.

Now these same children have invited me to preside over their graduation from swimming school. They look forward to coming to the pool now; they swim back and forth, play games underwater, even dive in the deep end. This did not come about overnight. It came through hard work, under the guidance of a good swimming teacher who knows just how to demonstrate the strokes and skills she wants her pupils to develop.

The transformation starts in the "kiddie pool," where drowning is difficult even if you have a talent for it. There the children learn to duck their heads under the water and hold their breath. They learn to blow bubbles. They hold on to the side and learn to kick.

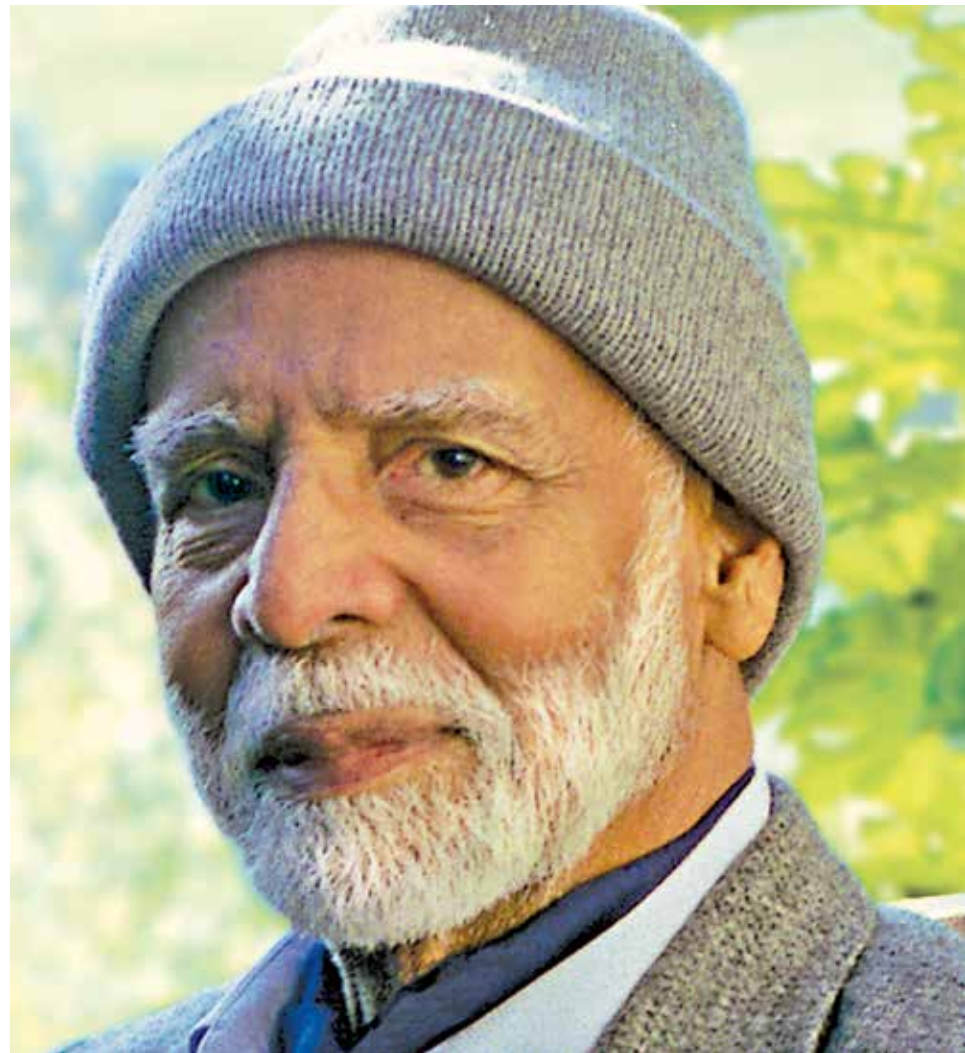
Finally comes time for the big pool, of which they are scared stiff. This is only natural; after all, the water is over their heads. To their vivid imaginations, drowning is too distinct a possibility to ignore, lifeguard or no lifeguard. And it looks so far from one side to the other!

Partly they are persuaded into the water; partly, I suspect, they are pushed. They feel this is a monstrous unkindness. "We're land creatures," they want to argue. "Why should we learn to get along in an alien element?" That is a logical question. But after a while, through guidance and experience, they lose that fear of the water. Now they are at home in the pool.

We accept this as a natural part of a child's education. Learning to do stunts in the water is part of growing up. If we never get the opportunity to see somebody do such wonderful things in the mental world, it is mainly because our civilization

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*From our archives: Eknath Easwaran, 1993*



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### 1 Learning to Swim



Children are often afraid to get into the water, but once they learn to swim, they are at home there. It's the same with us and meditation, Easwaran writes: and the treasures that beckon are not found on the surface but deep below.

### 5 How to Deepen Meditation



To get the most from meditation, we have to learn to go deeper into consciousness where the resources for creative living arise. And to do this requires more than that half hour of meditation, Easwaran tells us. Surprisingly, perhaps, to deepen meditation, we need to work on what we say and do during the rest of the day.

### 8 Deepening Meditation: Questions & Answers



Easwaran answers some of the questions that come up most frequently when people want to take their meditation practice to another level. What does "going deeper" mean? What are the signs that it is happening? And what's the connection between meditation and the rest of the day?

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### Blue Mountain Center of Meditation

The Center 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 Fruits of Meditation



Christine Easwaran

**W**E ARE continuing our series on Sri Eknath Easwaran's eight-point program of passage meditation, devoting this issue to the relationship between going deeper in meditation and what we do during the rest of the day.

Easwaran's lead article, "Learning

to Swim," is taken from his book *Conquest of Mind*, which is devoted to just this subject. Using the ancient Indian image of the mind as a deep pool, Easwaran compares learning to dive below the surface to what we do in meditation when we take it to a deeper level. A swimming pool isn't all that deep, but consciousness is fathomless: the deeper we go, he says, the more we can benefit from what meditation offers.

In his second article, "How to Deepen Meditation" (p. 5), Easwaran explains some of the connections between meditation and the rest of the day, and how and why all the points of his program work together to deepen not just meditation but the quality of our lives. If, in meditation, we go through the words of a passage like the Prayer of St. Francis – "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace" – we need to go through the day acting as an instrument of peace. If we can do this,

the next day's meditation will be deeper.

We hear so much today about how meditation helps us cope with stress and lowers blood pressure. Easwaran wanted us never to forget that the real goal of this ancient art is nothing less than Self-realization: discovery of the changeless reality that is our real nature.

Easwaran's articles are followed by exchanges with his students on these topics: "Deepening Meditation: Questions and Answers" (p. 8). The answers he gave over the years to searching questions from sincere students are valuable complements to the material in his books, so we hope to feature this kind of material in future issues. We love to hear from you.

*Christine Easwaran*

Christine Easwaran

For the Board of Trustees

## Instructions in Meditation

- \* Choose a time for meditation when you can sit for half an hour in uninterrupted quiet. Early morning is best, before the activities of the day begin.
- \* Select a place that is cool, clean, and quiet.
- \* Sit with your back and head erect, on the floor or on a straight-backed chair. A back support may be helpful.
- \* Close your eyes and begin to go slowly, in your mind, through the words of a simple, positive inspirational passage from one of the world's great spiritual traditions.
- \* While meditating, do not follow any association of ideas or allow your mind to reflect on the meaning of the words. If you are giving your full attention to each word, the meaning cannot help sinking in.
- \* When distractions come, do not resist them, but give more attention to the words of the passage.
- \* When you reach the end of the passage, you may use it again as necessary to complete your period of meditation until you have memorized others.
- \* Resolve to have your meditation every day – however full your schedule, whatever interruptions threaten, whether you are sick or well.

*Continued from page 1* the mind. But with the right training, any of us can learn to be at home in the world of the mind, just as those children learned to be at home in the water.

### Beneath the Surface

Classical Indian mysticism compares the mind to a lake, which for most of us is continually lashed into waves by the winds of emotional stimulus and response. The real storm winds are four: anger, fear, greed, and self-will. One or another is generally blowing. As a result, the water is in a constant state of agitation. Even when the surface appears calm, murky currents are stirring underneath.

Through meditation and the other powerful allied disciplines, however, the lake of the mind can be made absolutely clear. When not even a ripple disturbs the surface, you can look into the crystal waters of the mind and see the very bottom: the divine ground of existence which is the basis of our personality, which in Sanskrit is called simply Atman, “the Self.”

On the surface level of awareness, everyone seems separate. We look different, wear different clothes, have different speech patterns, different ambitions, different conditioning. This is the physical level of awareness, below which the vast majority of us cannot see because of the agitation of the mind.

Just below the surface is the level of personal, individual consciousness, a comparatively shallow region which is easily stirred by the winds of sense impressions and emotions. The more physically oriented we are – that is, the more we identify with our bodies and feelings – the more caught up we will be in this mind-world of constantly changing forms. In this state it can be quite a chore to get close to other people; all our awareness is caught in the things that make us seem separate from them and unique.

Their differences seem to keep getting in our way.

And underlying this level, largely unsuspected, lies the depths of the collective unconscious. There is only one collective unconscious: at bottom, everyone’s unconscious is the same. The deeper we get, the more clearly we shall see that our differences with others are superficial, and that ninety-nine percent of what we are is the same for everyone.

To the extent that we can turn our back on our petty, private mind-world and learn to dive into deeper consciousness, we can free ourselves from the influence of the storms that stir up those shallow waters at the surface. At the same time, as we get deeper, we move closer and closer to other people; we feel closer to life as a whole. This, in effect, is what learning to swim in the unconscious is all about.

I have read of people who can race along on a Harley-Davidson and leap over a row of cars. This is an accomplishment, I agree. It requires daring, training, and resolution. But of what real use is it? By contrast, with that same kind of daring, you can learn to go deep-sea diving in the fathomless lake of the mind. In our contemporary world, when most people, I think, feel helplessly at sea, this is a vital gift. When you master it, your life becomes a beacon that others can follow.

The mind, of course, has been the subject of very serious study. But from the point of view of spiritual psychology, how can we expect to understand the mind by using the same methods we use to study the physical universe? The very concept of entering the unconscious while conscious is beyond the scope of our imagination. We identify ourselves with the mind, so how can we expect to study it objectively? As long as we believe we are the mind, we take for granted that we can find fulfillment by catering to its demands and living

for its private satisfactions. And as long as we remain at the surface like this, we can never see through the mind clearly. We have little choice but to be tossed about like a toy boat in its fierce storms.

But we can learn a different perspective. In meditation we discover that we are not the mind. It is an inner world of its own, an environment we can learn to move through. Just as those children now go to the pool with eagerness on their faces, when I find tempests rising in the mind I have learned to swim with joy. I can dive to the bottom and bring up pearls, the infinite inner resources that are the legacy of us all. Instead of feeling threatened by adverse circumstances, I can remain calm and help to change those circumstances. Instead of moving away from difficult people, I can actually enjoy their company, move closer to them, and win them over.

This vast treasury is within the reach of all. Sri Ramakrishna, one of the greatest mystics India has ever produced, sang ecstatically of what waits to be discovered at the seabed of consciousness:

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep  
In the Ocean of God’s Beauty;  
If you descend to the uttermost depths,  
There you will find the gem of Love.

Once we have learned to dive deep in meditation, there is no end to the resources we can bring to our daily life, no challenge we will be unable to meet. Each morning we can descend to the depths and gather armloads of precious jewels: breathtaking gems of love and wisdom, lustrous pearls of patience and compassion. And we can distribute them freely, knowing we have an infinite inheritance from which to draw every day. ⇨

# How to Deepen Meditation

By Eknath Easwaran

I AM GOING to make a number of practical suggestions for deepening meditation. It does not matter whether you have been meditating for a long time or a short time; all these suggestions are equally applicable. They are not taken from books; they are the distilled observations on my own experience, offered in response to a question that serious students ask over and over: “How can I go deeper?”

Surprisingly, it is not during meditation that you make progress in meditation; it is during the rest of the day. What you do in meditation is get the power, install the dynamo; the actual work is done after you open your eyes, get up, and go out into the world.

In the actual practice of meditation, when you are going through an inspirational passage like the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi – “Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand” – you are driving these precious words deeper and deeper into the unconscious. That’s what concentration means. If the words fall so deep into the unconscious that they begin to change your ways of thinking and reacting, that is what meditation is for: we become what we meditate on.

But that doesn’t happen if you meditate and then spend the rest of the day following the same old patterns, reacting in the same old manner. We need to draw upon the power released in meditation to implement the words on which we are meditat-

ing. At the breakfast table, when there is a little provocation, you should be able to smile and come up with a kind word. In the evening, when you come home tired, you should still be able to be kind and supportive. This is how old habits are changed, old patterns of thinking are transformed – with little changes in thought and behavior during the rest of the day.

That is why I say that it’s not enough if you meditate regularly or longer than half an hour. The rest of your day must facilitate that meditation. If you have a good meditation in the morning and then yield to compulsive urges, dwell on yourself, or get self-willed or angry, you are undoing all the work you did that morning in meditation.

On the other hand, if you go on doing your best to follow the rest of this eight-point program throughout the day, not only are you going to have a better meditation on the following day, you are beginning to solve your problems and even to help other people solve theirs. When you’re able to do your job with cheerful concentration, when you can give and take when things go wrong, when you’re working under pressure and are able to remain kind, you’re helping your meditation immensely. So try to remember every day that you are participating in meditation even at breakfast, at work, at school, in the garden, everywhere.

## Warming Up

Of course, this works both ways: meditation makes it easier to get through the day without agitation. You can look at meditation as warm-up exercises for the rest of the day so that you don’t get tense and sprain your mind. Without meditation, if you go and try to work with people who are difficult like yourself, you may not be able to digest your dinner afterwards. You may have difficulty falling asleep, and if you do manage to

fall asleep, you may not be able to get up. Every morning’s meditation is a kind of warm-up session for stretching your capacity to rub off the angles and corners of your personality.

There is a famous definition in the Bhagavad Gita: “Yoga is evenness of mind.” Here, *yoga* means not only meditation but the essential art of living. The Gita is trying to say that keeping on an even keel through life’s ups and downs will protect your mind against pulling a muscle during the day. Not only that, it will deepen your meditation the next morning too.

Most people could make a lot more progress in meditation if they would learn to keep the mind from getting agitated. That is one thing I learned quickly, right in the midst of my university work. I had all kinds of responsibilities and difficulties, and often even personal conflicts, and I found quickly that if I could keep from getting agitated when dealing with these problems, I could see the results in meditation the very next morning.

## Detachment

In the Gita, this skill is called *vairagya*: the absence of personal entanglement, in which things and people are valued for what we want to get from them. Don’t get entangled in anything, the Gita means: don’t get all embroiled in how you feel about it or how you think it will benefit you. Whatever you do, do it with detachment. Gradually you can learn to concentrate completely on the job at hand – whether it is interesting or not, whether it appeals to you or not – and then drop it at will at the end of the day.

This skill is essential for improving meditation, for to the extent you are glued to the events and problems of the day, you can’t help taking them home with

*Continued on next page*

*Continued from previous page* you. The day's distractions will slip into your mind, where they will continue to claim your attention while you're asleep and insist on more attention the next morning in meditation.

This doesn't mean neglecting your work, of course. Just the opposite: you give whatever you are doing your complete attention, your very best effort; then, when you go home, you give your full attention there too. Full attention everywhere – an unbroken thread of attention throughout the day. That is yoga.

The same strategy applies to personal entanglements, which is where almost every human being has trouble. If you want to give your best to any relationship, you have to be detached – not from others, but from yourself. Otherwise you'll always be thinking about what you can get from that relationship. If you're completely detached from yourself, you'll be thinking about what you can give. You come to feel the needs of everybody else exactly as if they were your own, which means you cannot be negative, you cannot be unkind, you can only be supportive.

And this, in turn, helps meditation. You can remind yourself every day that progress depends upon how much you are aware of the needs of others and how much you try to meet those needs. Even though we hear this often, it is not easy to keep it in mind. That is why I say it over and over again: being aware of the needs of all those around you helps your absorption in meditation. The connection is easy to see if you think about the other side of the coin: if you get absorbed in your own private pleasures and profit, that will act as an impediment to this ideal of total absorption.

Remind yourself every day, therefore, to cultivate a sense of proportion, a sense of what truly matters. I hear petty personal differences being

ventilated as fundamental issues of life and death – differences so ridiculously small that to waste time and vitality over them is tragic. If you can keep yourself from getting agitated by such things and keep your mind on an even keel throughout the day, taking the rough with the smooth, the Gita would say you are mastering the art of living. If you can laugh it off when things go against you while still giving your very best, you are mastering the art of living. If you are able to throw yourself heart and soul into a selfless job that you don't like, or work harmoniously with difficult people instead of ploughing a lonely furrow, you are mastering the art of living. And all of these skills will take your meditation deeper day by day.

## “All Life Is Yoga”

Here is a good motto to have on your desk, which I think is taken from Sri Aurobindo: “All life is yoga.” For the true spiritual aspirant, every day is yoga day. Every moment there is a choice, from the time you wake up until you go to bed: shall I do what is temporarily pleasing, appealing to my ego or senses or self-will – which is very easy for everybody – or shall I choose to do what will benefit all? Shall I eat what appeals to me, or shall I choose food that will strengthen my body to work for all? Shall I refrain from doing trivial little things to please myself so that I can give my time to helping others? There are choices like this all day long – and interestingly enough, as you keep on making right choices, you'll find fewer distractions in your meditation.

In the early days, when I had to look through mountains of meditation notebooks from my students at Cal, one question that kept coming up was “Why do I have so many distractions in meditation?” I would write, “Because you have so many distractions during the day.” Distractions come up in meditation because there

are distractions in life. If you don't have any distractions during the day, you won't have any distractions in meditation. That is the sum and substance of it.

Where do distractions come from? Where do *your* distractions come from? The list may seem different for each person, but the variations are just details. Everyone gets distracted by the same kinds of thoughts: work, family, past experiences to relive or regret, future events to plan for or get anxious about. It's a very familiar catalogue, and the answer is universal: to minimize distractions, go to the source – where they arise.

Somebody was asking me recently how to minimize distractions. Minimizing self-will is minimizing distractions. Reducing the number of things one does to please oneself is reducing the number of distractions. The more you starve self-will, the fewer distractions you will have. That is the all-important connection between meditation and the rest of the day.

## As Meditation Deepens

When there are no distractions in meditation, the mind process slows down automatically. And when the mind slows down in meditation, you go deeper into consciousness. These two go hand in hand: in fact, the slow, unbroken flow of attention is what sinking deeper into consciousness means.

Below a certain depth in meditation, when you have really learned to concentrate, there will be a living charge in the words on which you are meditating. Then it's no longer a line that you are reciting; if your concentration is unbroken, the words will fall right into the depths of your consciousness, where they come to life. “When you keep thinking about sense objects, attachment comes . . .” As you are repeating words like these from the Gita, their application also comes

## HOW TO DEEPEN MEDITATION

along, not just their meaning, bringing with it an appeal – “Don’t let your mind dwell on sense objects” – and a kind of resolution not to let your attention wander to sense objects because “attachment breeds desire, the lust of possession which, when thwarted, burns to anger . . .”

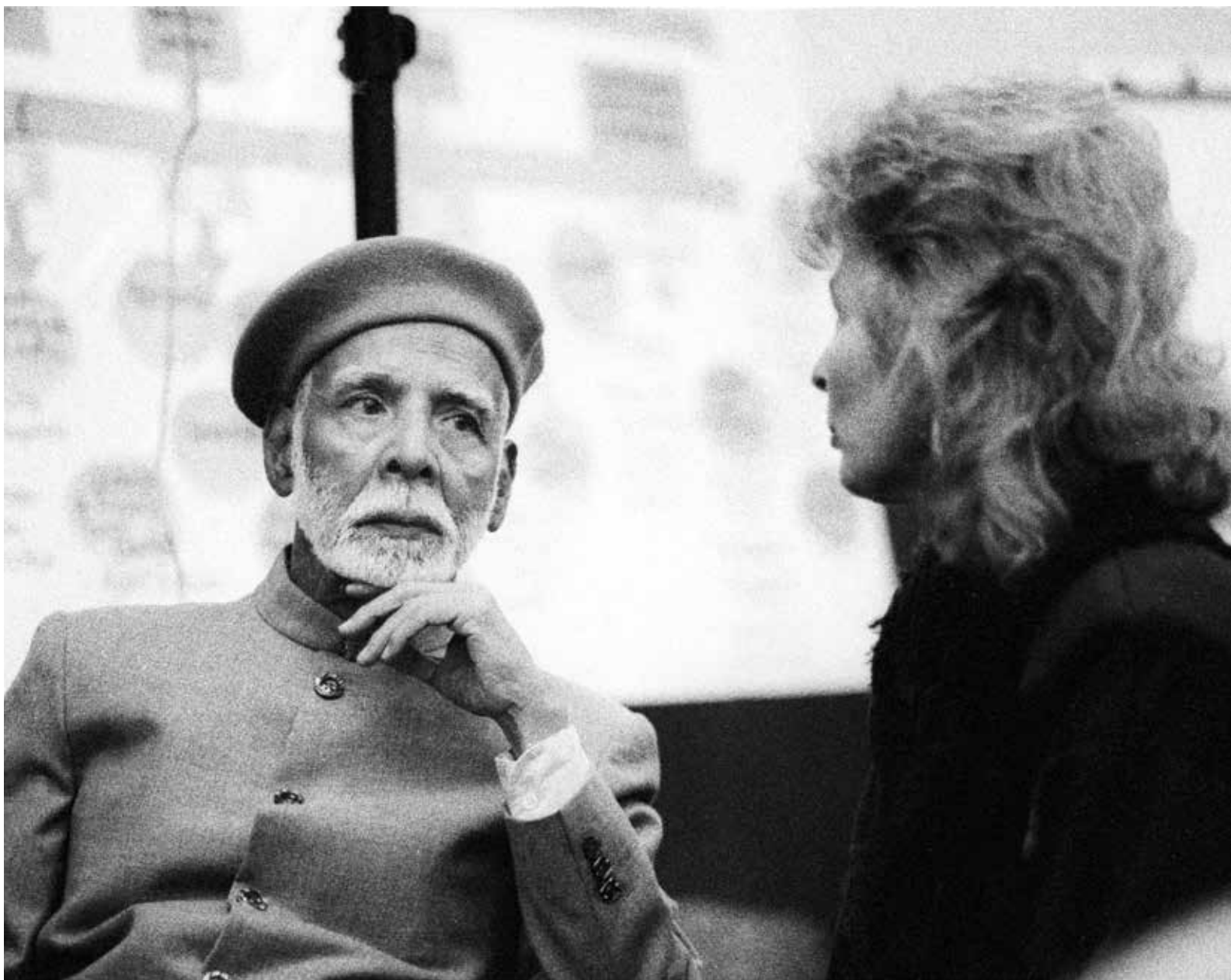
Now all the practical applications of those words will come. Such a wealth of application to daily living! You’re no longer meditating on words; you are meditating on the vital applications of eternal truths. And the test is that after you finish your meditation, the application of the words will follow you, helping you make the

best choices throughout the day. That is the proof that your meditation has been good. If you see that the vital applications of the inspirational passage are with you, your meditation has been very good. If they are not with you, there is still considerable room for improvement.

The secret here is unifying your desires around this supreme goal. Due to the inestimable blessing of my teacher’s love, once I turned to meditation, there was nothing that I wanted except awareness of God, and for that I was prepared to pay any price that was asked of me. That very desire, as it grew stronger and stronger, gradually

consumed all my smaller desires, so that my progress in meditation was rather rapid – just because I did not have many other desires and distractions to struggle against.

So try to focus your attention all the time on the supreme goal. Renew your commitment every day. It is a commitment that will benefit everyone around you. And as your spiritual awareness grows, you’ll find more and more opportunities for contributing to the welfare of those around you. Remind yourself every day that meditation is not for your benefit alone; it is for the benefit of the whole world. ☞



# Deepening Meditation: Questions & Answers

By Eknath Easwaran

*What do you mean by “going to a deeper level”? How does that relate to going to a higher state of consciousness?*

WELL, I ALSO TALK about going forwards, and even sideways. These are all just metaphors. But it is interesting to see that mystics East and West talk the same, so there must be something universal about them. For example, every mystic talks about the soul being hidden deep within, and many have compared spiritual progress to climbing a mountain.

But “going deeper” is also more than metaphor. As you may know, Indian mysticism – and some Western mystics too – describe the Self as being covered by a number of “sheaths” or “bodies,” so that personality is like those little Russian dolls that nestle inside one another.

The outermost sheath is the physical body, and inside that is a kind of body made of the senses, which look out on the world around us. Those two layers are very outward-oriented. Deeper still lies the world of the mind, which has three layers: emotions, intellect, and ego.

To realize the Self, which is at the very center of all these wrappings, we have to turn away from the sensory world and look into what mystics call the heart, the inner person, the world within – the world of the mind. So

“going deeper,” as I usually simplify it, means getting far enough below the surface of consciousness that we discover that this body is not who we are. It is only a covering, which we learn to take off in meditation. Much later and much deeper, we make a similar discovery about the mind. And when we finally learn to slip out of body and mind and intellect and even ego in meditation, there is nothing but the Self. This is the ultimate reality that most religions call God, so in traditional language, when you go deeper in meditation, you are moving closer to God.

Living fully is living to the very height and depth of our being, of which we cannot have any idea until we really see the height. Most of us think our height is something between five and six feet. Gradually, in meditation, you begin to straighten up. Little by little you grow taller and taller until your head goes above the ceiling. People look and say, “He’s grown above his house!” – which is the body. (The ceiling is the intellect.)

The marvel is there is no limit to our height. It is this awareness that every day you’re able to grow a little more that is really living. The vast majority of human beings get up the same height and go to bed the same height – assuming there isn’t any shrinkage. This isn’t really living. Until we turn inwards – yes, I am mixing metaphors – we cannot understand how great our true height is.

People who have no depth at all have no height at all. That’s why a little breeze will blow them over. A puff of circumstance will shake them to their foundation because they have no foundation. That’s why I say that in order to live at our best – we needn’t even use the word spiritual or religious – to live fully, vitally, never being afraid, never being tired or getting tense, and making our life a rich gift to everyone who comes in close contact with us, I don’t think there is any other basis than the practice of meditation.

*Many times when I’m meditating it seems like I’m just getting into it when half an hour is up. How do I know that I’m ready to go deeper or meditate more?*

REMEMBER, WHEN I KEEP talking about depth in meditation, it is not the time that matters; it is the depth. If you are increasing your concentration and keeping your mind calm and one-pointed during the day, distractions in meditation will become fewer and fewer and your mind will slow down naturally.

When this happens, it is very important to come to a retreat if you possibly can. There are people leading these retreats who have been meditating for many years and who have been trained to check about your eating habits and exercise and sleep and work and friends and entertainment and a lot of other matters that have to be carefully observed before you increase your period of meditation. But always remember that if you can meditate half an hour every morning and evening without fail, at the same time, with sustained enthusiasm, and give your very best to the rest of these disciplines during the rest of every day, your meditation cannot help deepening dramatically.

It is essential in these stages not to lose hold of the passage. It is possible to lose the passage and not even know it, so that you think your mind has slowed down when it is simply wandering in the unconscious. The inspirational passage is your safety line. Whatever happens, you must be able to maintain your concentration. You must be able to hold on to the inspirational passage and not let it go even for a second. That is very important advice for everybody, beginners and longtime students alike. If you fall asleep, you are losing the inspirational passage. If your mind wanders, you are losing the inspirational passage. If your attention is divided, you are losing the

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## Levels of Consciousness

THE INDIAN SCRIPTURES SAY there is a great deal hiding our real Self – covering it up, if you like, in dense layers of mistaken identity.

I came across a perfect illustration of these levels of personality when a friend showed me a Russian doll shaped like an egg, apparently made from one piece of wood. I had never seen a doll like this, so I turned it around in my hands admiring its artistry. Then, anticipating my surprise, my friend took the doll back, held it up before my eyes, and twisted it open. What had seemed solid was only a shell; inside was another doll exactly like it but smaller, fitted to the outer one as nicely as a hand inside a glove.

This is the Gita's idea of body and mind: one hidden inside the other and possessing the same form.

Teresa of Avila has a nice turn on this image: she invites us to think of ourselves as a castle with concentric chambers made of pure crystal. Imagine a Russian doll made of crystal; wouldn't it be beautiful? The outermost shell, the body, would be opaque, but the one inside would be a bit translucent. And at the very center would be the Atman, which shines as pure intelligence. The more we identify with the Self, the Bhagavad Gita would say, the brighter our whole life will be. Conversely, if we think we are no more than the body, very little of the imprisoned splendor within us can shine forth.

In fact, this idea that we are the body is the most monstrous superstition that humanity is subject to. No case of mistaken identity could cause greater grief. At the very least, as William James put it, this is so limiting a view that it leads us to think and act as if we had no more resources than our little finger.

Just as we have a physical body, the Gita says, we have a mental or “subtle” body consisting of thoughts, memories, desires, and other such intangibles. The physical body,

being physical, is subject to decay; but the subtle body is a field of forces, which are nonphysical in the sense that they are not measurable in the objective world. But that doesn't make them less real. We can't see electricity, but we can see the effects of it. Similarly, though we can't see anger, we can see the effects of it, not only in damaged relationships but even in damage to the body in heart attack or stroke. And although we can't see forgiveness, we can see the effects of it in the healing of emotional wounds.

Imagine the Self at the core of our set of Russian dolls, looking out at the world through all those layers! No wonder we see as through a glass darkly – very darkly indeed. The Gita is trying to tell us that our life is really what our consciousness is. Everything we do and say and think is based upon the state of consciousness we have at the moment. When we are happy, we don't have any serious complaints against life; but if we're depressed, though we may have all the satisfactions that make for happiness, we feel empty inside – not because the world has changed, but because there has been a change in consciousness.

One big problem is that this is our personality. We think it is who we are. Not only can we not imagine removing it, we don't really want to; we're rather fond of it, and we imagine others feel the same way. This is a very limited view. The word *personality* comes from the Latin word *persona*: a mask. What we call personality is the mask of the ego, which hides the divine essence that is within. In this perspective we are all impostors, acting separate and self-centered and angry and playing all kinds of undesirable roles. Our real nature is to be naturally good, naturally kind, naturally big-hearted. It may not show, but all the conditioning that makes us selfish, self-willed, violent, and even cruel is a mask that can be taken away. That is why I find that image of a Russian doll so appealing: you can imagine taking off mask after mask until the innermost Self is revealed. ☞ From *Essence of the Bhagavad Gita*

*Continued from* inspirational passage. If you are not giving your very best attention, you are losing the inspirational passage. So whatever happens, don't let go of the passage; don't let it slip away. I don't have any hesitation in saying that as long as you can cling continuously to the inspirational passage, you can descend to any depth in the mind in safety.

*What are the signs of absorption in meditation?*

FIRST AND FOREMOST, YOU will begin to consider the joy of others a little more important than your own. That will probably begin with your family and friends and then extend to your co-workers, but generally your sense of separateness from those around you will be less and less, so you identify with each of them more easily. And that will rub off on them too.

Secondly, your senses will gradually come more and more under your control. As you begin to look upon your body as a vehicle of loving service, for example, your motivation for eating will become very different.

In meditation itself, I can give you a few little hints as to the signs of absorption. One of the earliest is that your senses slowly close down. You become so completely absorbed in the inspirational passage that there are no sounds, no distractions. As St. Teresa of Avila says, all the bees of the senses have come back to their hive and are sitting there quietly making honey. Sounds, though there may be a dim awareness of them, will seem at first as if they are coming from far, far away. Eventually you will not be aware of them at all. Other physical sensations, too, will cease to impinge on your consciousness. All this will be like writing on water; these distractions will not have any effect at all. You enter a stage of what I can only call quiet intoxication, in which the body feels almost as

if it were not there. This is the beginning of the loss of body-consciousness: the burden of the body seems to have been lifted; the weight of the ego has been laid down.

Second, as you get absorbed, you are no longer dealing with distractions or with the problem of sleep in meditation. Where you used to fall asleep, now you've learned that the very wave of sleep that used to overcome you can be ridden down into deeper consciousness just as a surfer does. When you see a wave of sleep coming from the depths of your consciousness, instead of lowering your head and succumbing, you can jump on the wave of sleep and keep awake, concentrated on the inspirational passage. Then you find that you're not on the same old level of awareness; you have changed to a deeper level. Interestingly enough, you may feel greater pressure in your head at that level too, just as if you were diving deeper into the ocean.

(Incidentally, this conquest of sleep doesn't come suddenly or by magic. There is a very difficult phase where at times, in spite of your best intentions, you fall asleep in meditation and are not even aware that you have fallen asleep. The way to break out of that stage is not during meditation only, but during the rest of the day. You go about being alert about your senses, not yielding to their tantalizing call. You look for opportunities to turn your back on self-will and repeat the mantram more; you become more particular about what you do before you fall asleep at night. This kind of vigilance will enable you to break through not only the last stages of the sleeping problem, but many of the other problematic stages as meditation deepens.)

Third, the inspirational passage slows down greatly, but the theme is still clear and the connection is still intact. Please make sure, when the inspirational passage slows down like this, that you're able to keep the connection intact! Otherwise, meditation

has not slowed down; it has stopped, leaving you in Alice's Wonderland.

Eventually, at a certain great depth, your repetition of the words of the inspirational passage will do away with subject-object duality entirely – just for half a minute or so, just “the span of an *Ave Maria*.” At that time it is almost as if you're not reciting the words of the inspirational passage, but the words of the inspirational passage are reciting themselves.

This is a very poor attempt at explaining what cannot be explained, but these are some of the signs that absorption is slowly beginning. But make sure that you don't let go of the inspirational passage, and that during the day you follow all these disciplines with sustained enthusiasm: repetition of the mantram, training the senses, and particularly, opening your awareness to the people around and not letting self-will or selfishness come in the way.

This period of absorption, on the one hand, is a very difficult time. On the other hand, it is terribly exhilarating. You'll find attention trying to escape from your control in so many ways that vigilance and concentration are required every moment. You are changing from one level of consciousness, where all of us are conditioned to walk, to an unknown level where there are no landmarks that you are familiar with, and where you may find yourself at a loss how to harness the immense energy that is coming into your hands. It is essential that this energy be harnessed for a selfless purpose rather than for pleasing yourself. Fortunately, all the disciplines of the eight-point program count as a selfless purpose, so you can pour all your excess energy into walking with the mantram, selfless service, and generally putting others first.

Gradually, when the mind becomes still and the ego is reduced to its minimal size, a tremendous experience takes place: you lose your nexus with

the past. It is not that you don't remember the past, but there is no emotional entanglement. You can look upon mistakes in the past with detachment and compassion, which is a very necessary condition for all of us who are on the spiritual path. As detachment grows, we are released from the tyranny of the past; the link between us and our past is cut, and we look at past mistakes as we might watch others in a film.

*Do the insights you're talking about come while you're in meditation or from the subconscious level later in the day?*

**A**S YOU GO DEEPER and deeper within, you will find that the source of all wisdom is there within you. It is only information that we can get from outside; all inspiration comes from within. The deeper you go every day in meditation, therefore, the more wisdom you can bring up.

Equally important, that wisdom is connected with the will. Many people know what damage smoking does, but they cannot give it up; there is no connection between that knowledge and the will. In meditation, once you get that insight, the will is immediately connected. It's a different kind of knowing. That is why St. Francis of Assisi says that our knowledge is only as deep as our action. So that's what meditation does: it not only brings wisdom from within; it connects it with the human will.

*If we're concentrating completely on the passage in meditation, how can we get this wisdom?*

**I**F YOU'RE GIVING COMPLETE attention to the words of the passage, their meaning cannot help going in. You may not be aware of it happening, but you will see the fruits of it in your daily life – not necessarily the same day, though that can happen, but espe-

cially if you take a moment or two to recall your life a few months or a year earlier. After decades you'll go beyond the passage entirely, go beyond all the words, but even a little of the regular practice of meditation will release a healing wisdom into your daily life.

This distinction between intellectual knowledge and spiritual wisdom puzzles many people today, particularly those who received a university education. I too received this training, first as a student and then as a professor, so naturally I thought that the intellect is the highest mode of knowing and there is nothing beyond. Then, in one of the great climaxes of medita-

tion, my mind became still. According to all that I had learned, when my mind became still I should have been bankrupt. Instead of that, I felt I had awakened from a dream. I saw the vast wisdom that is present in every human being, the vast love that is present in every human being, which is called the Atman in Sanskrit: our real Self.

On the one hand, you get access to all this wealth of wisdom – which, by the way, you get only when you live for others; you'll never get access to it when you live for yourself. But you don't lose your intellectual training; I still use all my training as a professor to reach every

*Continued on next page*



*Continued from previous page* one of you. When I started teaching meditation, I began to look at all my experiences, clarify them, classify them for the purpose of communication. That's how all my books came to be written. But the actual work was done in meditation.

It is entirely below the surface level that you blaze a trail into deepest consciousness, just as you might blaze a trail through wilderness. As the trail goes deeper and deeper, you see for yourself how real is the world inside and what resources beckon. That is why I keep telling you to get greater depth in your meditation: so that you can get over this hypnotic spell that the goals worth following are out in the external world rather than within. Unshakable security, high ideals, immense energy, selfless ideals: all these are inside; they don't have anything to do with what is outside. If you deepen your meditation, you can make this discovery yourself – and once you do, half the battle is over.

*When you started to get below the surface and forget your body, wasn't that scary?*

IT WASN'T EASY, AND at first I was afraid when it began to happen, the way the mind panics when you start to go under water. But it's not deprivation; there is another side. When my concentration got so deep that I didn't hear the cars on the road, didn't feel the chair, wasn't aware of my body, I began to have a distant glimmer that there was a shining presence within me that dispelled all my fears. Until then I had been afraid, but my eagerness and my passion for Self-realization overcame those fears.

The way I would look into your mind is that there is fear and uncertainty on one side, but there is also the beginning of faith on the other side, the beginning of certitude. If you can deepen your meditation, you can deepen your faith.

*I don't feel capable of that kind of faith.*

THE GITA GIVES VERY good advice: the only right we have is to do what we can; the results are in the hands of the Lord. Don't give up; keep trying and all this will come to fruition. Gandhi says, "Full effort is full victory." That is all you are concerned with. Do everything you can and leave the results in the hands of the Lord.

In the early stages of meditation, most of us are likely to do fairly well. Many, many times – perhaps even hundreds – when I asked students after a few months how their meditation was going, they would say naturally, "Oh, very well. There is nothing so difficult as you try to make it out. 'Razor's edge' – what razor's edge?" And I learned to be patient and say, "Very good. I am glad; you seem to be a natural." Then, after a few months more, I would ask again, "How is your meditation?" And they would reply, "Stuck."

This is the rhythm of meditation: a little progress, then getting stuck. That's the time when you just keep on plugging. Keep on, keep at it, keep at it, keep at it, until the Lord gives you another push and you break through to a deeper level. And then all is pandemonium again, because a change in the level of consciousness changes your whole perspective on life. Your outlook changes, your relationships change, the whole world changes, you don't know where you are. It takes a long, long time to learn to walk on that level, almost like a little child trying to learn to walk; you walk a few steps and then sit down suddenly. But finally you get the knack of it – and then it is again no progress for a while, until you are ready to go deeper again.

All this can be bewildering, and much of it cannot be understood at all until later, when you look back. That is why I keep repeating that whenever meditation is difficult, whenever it is disappointing, whenever it doesn't

seem to be going anywhere, don't concern yourself with results; don't ask if you are going forward or backwards or sideways. We have nothing to do with these things; our part is simply to do our best.

*When I try to concentrate harder, I just get tense. What am I doing wrong?*

YOU CAN LOOK UPON your meditation room as a swimming pool. You come in the morning and get into the pool, and some days you swim well, but at the beginning there are also times when you just seem to float about on the surface with one of those tires around your waist. What do you call them? Inner tubes. No matter how hard you try, you can't get below the surface; you just stay there for the stipulated half-hour. To go deeper, you have to get rid of the inner tube, which is what you do by minimizing distractions during the day. (I understand that in southern California, the one use to which swimming pools are rarely put is swimming. They are for having parties around, with ample supplies of refreshments and many varieties of inner tubes. To get the benefit out of a swimming pool, you have to swim. It's the same with meditation.)

Making your greatest effort without tension is a skill that will seem natural once it is learned. Meditation is concentration, and concentration is relaxation because there is no division in the mind. When you're concentrating deeply, you *are* relaxing. So when I talk about effort, I don't mean physical strain. Instead I would suggest trying to attend to your will, which during meditation means particularly drawing yourself straight and making a continuous effort to see that attention doesn't waver. Over a long period of time this continuous effort will become natural. That may take years, but once concentration becomes natural, there is no more effort.

*I can relate to meditation, but why talk about all these other "ancillary disciplines"?*

I HAD A FRIEND IN the olden days who used to ask that. He would say, "I understand meditation, but why bring in all these other points? Isn't meditation enough?"

In particular, he simply detested any reference to sense training. Meditation yes, even mantram yes, but for heaven's sake, don't talk about sense training.

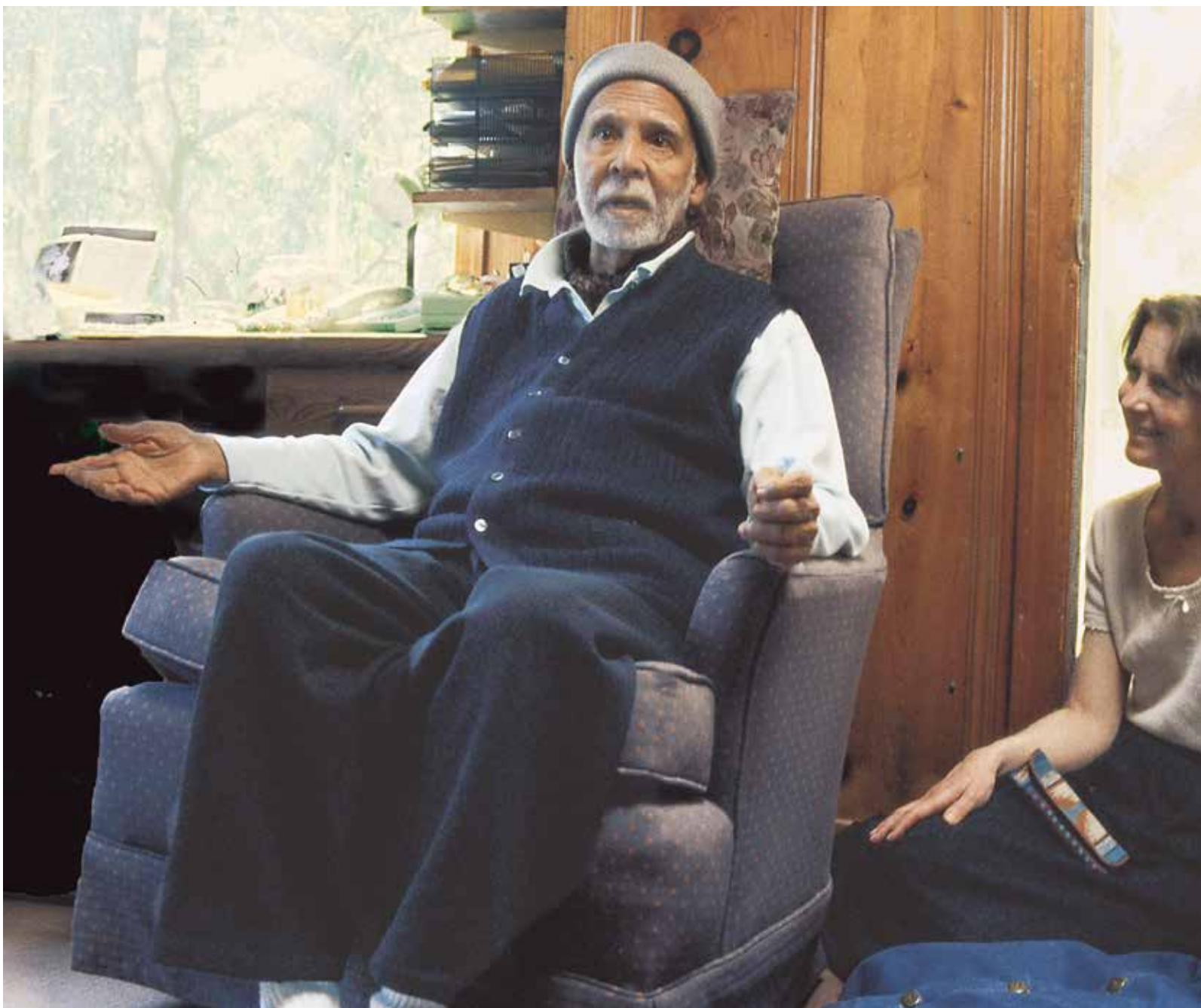
So I said, these all help each other. Sense training is not only necessary

for health; sense training helps the mind be one-pointed, just as a one-pointed mind helps train the senses. Both help govern negative passions, and transforming passions helps to still the mind, which is the goal of meditation.

Putting meditation first makes all the other disciplines easier, which in turn helps take your meditation deeper. Repeating the mantram throughout the day keeps the mind calm and kind when you run into trouble, and being able to go through the day with a calm mind means fewer distractions in meditation.

If you do all these with a continuous flow of attention, you will be deepening your meditation and your whole life.

"In other words," my friend complained, "you can't join the union if you don't have a job, and you can't get a job if you're not in the union." In those days I didn't know how to answer that kind of remark, but today I just say, Don't look upon these as separate disciplines. They are all ways of doing the same thing: training the mind, quietening the mind. But the foundation is the regular, daily practice of meditation. ⇨



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