



# 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 Path of Meditation

by Eknath Easwaran

**T**HERE IS nothing like meditation on earth. Each day it is new to me and fresh. I find it difficult to understand why everyone does not take to it. Millions dedicate their lives to art, music, literature, or science, which reveal just one facet of the priceless jewel hidden in the world. A life based on meditation on the Lord of Love within penetrates far beyond the multiplicity of existence into the indivisible realm of reality, where dwell infinite truth, joy, and beauty.

In meditation I see a clear, changeless goal far above the fever and fret of the day. This inner vision fills me with unshakable security, inspires me with wisdom beyond the reach of the intellect, and releases within me the capacity to act calmly and compassionately.

Until I took to meditation, I could not even conceive of the existence of this higher dimension. Once I began, I had to search for it through years of apparently unrewarding labor and recurring periods of anguish and agony, doubt and despair. It took many years of systematic, sustained practice to dispel the enveloping fog produced by the restless mind in its frantic search for fulfillment in the world without.

When this fog is dispelled completely, the Shvetashvatara Upanishad tells us what we shall see:

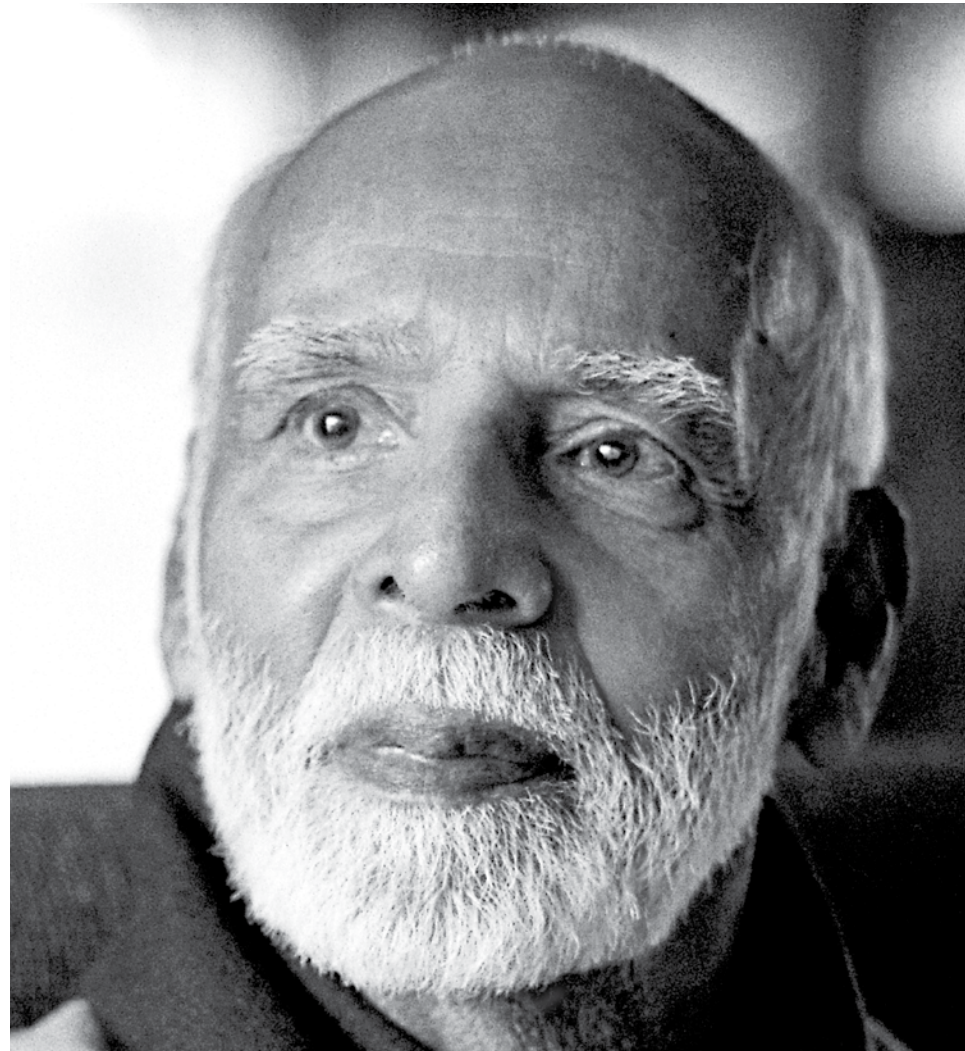
In the depths of meditation, sages  
Saw within themselves the Lord of Love,  
Who dwells in the heart of every creature.

Deep in the hearts of all he dwells, hidden  
Behind the gunas of law, energy,  
And inertia. He is the One; he rules  
Over time, space, and causality.

I am a very ordinary man who has made the common mistakes most of us commit in our ignorance. But through the blessing of my spiritual teacher, my mother's mother, I was enabled to turn inwards in search of "the Lord of Love, who dwells in the heart of every creature." In my search I followed a systematic program utilizing every aspect of daily living, not withdrawing from family and society but participating in life to the fullest

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*From our archives: Eknath Easwaran, 1993*



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## 1 The Path of Meditation



In one of his earliest pieces as founder of the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, Eknath Easwaran gives inspiration for achieving the supreme goal of life and instructions in the eight-point program of meditation he followed himself.

## 8 Meditation: Questions & Answers



Easwaran enjoyed fielding practical questions from serious students. Here we present some of the answers that throw light on the instructions in his books, especially the one most urgent to new students: "Can he still be my teacher after he has passed away?"

## 10 A Living Teacher



In our email forums, students who never met Easwaran tell how they find him a living presence in their lives.

## 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.

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# Passage Meditation



Christine Easwaran

**W**ITH THIS issue we begin a series on Sri Easwaran's eight-point program of meditation, starting with meditation and the program itself.

In 1978, when books on the subject for the general reader were few, it seemed natural to title Easwaran's contribution simply *Meditation*. Today, buyers facing hundreds of choices look at the cover and ask, "What *kind* of meditation?" So many things are called meditation now, and there are so many methods! That is why, in 2005, we decided to retitling his book and his eight-point program with a name other writers had given it much earlier: *Passage Meditation*.

Except for a new preface by Easwaran, that 1978 classic is unchanged. Over twenty years of teaching, however, Easwaran's audience grew, bringing many new students, more books, and fellowship groups around the world. All this led to fresh questions, which Easwaran tried to answer throughout his life. In this series we want to bring these answers to a much wider audience.

Though most of these questions have been asked over and over, many can be answered by one simple reminder: Read the book carefully

and follow the instructions. But Easwaran was an experienced teacher. He knew that basics need repeating, and that the basics of meditation are absolutely critical. In the 1960s he used to repeat his instructions in meditation every Saturday night, week after week, to students who must have heard them dozens of times already. And he urged everyone practicing his method of meditation to read the book again once a year.

Toward the very end of his life, after months of silence imposed by his illness, Easwaran announced that he

pose behind this series is to make this legacy available to our readers.

One of these questions is particularly urgent today: If, as he says in his books, everyone needs a teacher, can those who never met him still be his students? Can he guide our practice when he is no longer around?

As it turns out, Easwaran was actually asked this question several times while he was still very much alive. His answers are the heart of this section. For myself, I might add that since his passing, many new students have told us that they find him a living presence

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*Many questions about meditation can be answered by one simple reminder: Read the book carefully and follow the instructions. But one question is particularly urgent today: Can he still be my teacher? Can he guide my practice when he is no longer around?*

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in their lives. We have included some of their testimonies, taken mostly from our Young Adult email group, in the box on pages 10–11.

When Sri Easwaran was alive, we would often go to his evening talk troubled by some unspoken

wanted to give a very special talk. The hall was overflowing. And what was the surprise topic? The basics of meditation and his eight-point program: always the same, but powerful in their simplicity, quite sufficient, he assured us, to take any of us along the spiritual path as far as we wanted to go.

Our lead article, "The Path of Meditation," is one of the earliest presentations of his eight-point program: inspiration followed by instruction. If you have read it before, please take a few minutes to read it again; it is pure Easwaran.

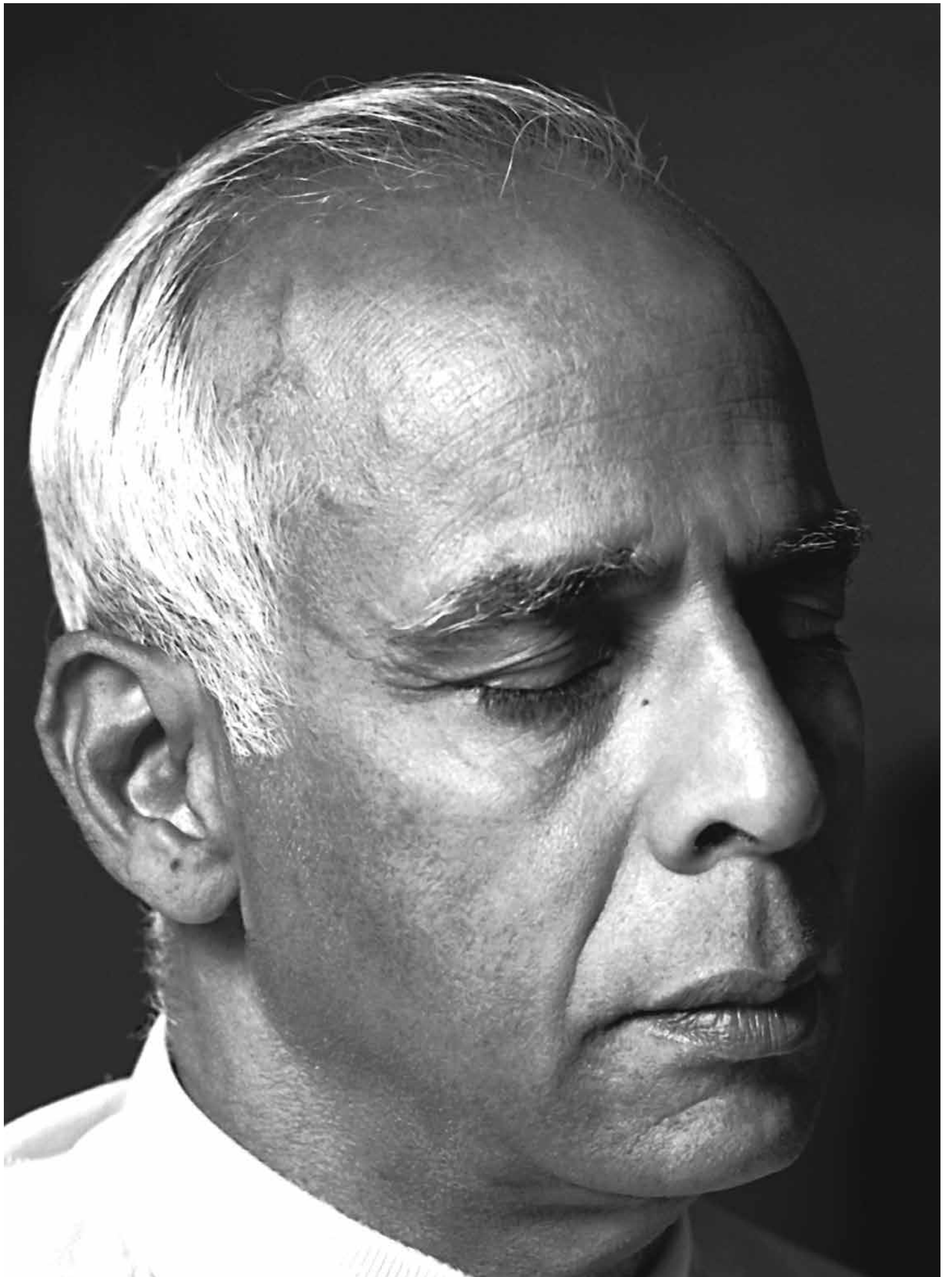
The article that follows, "Meditation: Questions and Answers" (p. 8), includes frequently asked questions with, we hope, new light thrown by fresh answers from our archive of unpublished material. We are finding quite a lot of this material as we explore what he left us, and one pur-

question and find that question answered, indirectly but clearly, without it even being asked. Today people who never met him say they have the same experience when watching a video of those talks. It's a familiar refrain: "He just seems to be speaking to me!"

From the young people I have met since Easwaran's passing, I have no hesitation in saying that he continues to guide everyone who turns to his books and talks with an open heart. I see this unfolding daily at Ramagiri Ashram. Our retreats here in Tomales aim at helping meditators new and old learn from Easwaran like this: directly, in much the same way in which we learned from him during his lifetime.

*Christine Easwaran*

For the Board of Trustees



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measure possible. My experience fits more or less into the traditional period of sadhana or spiritual disciplines referred to by the sages, but even a lifetime is a small offering for so precious a jewel. We do not need to wait until the great culmination of our sadhana to reap rewards. As our attitudes and actions become focused on an overriding goal, integration takes place at the deepest level in character, conduct, and consciousness. Sri Krishna asks in the Bhagavad Gita: "How can you use all your intelligence without being integrated? How can you use all your creative faculties without being integrated? How can you be at peace without being integrated? How can you be happy without being integrated?" Meditation is integration.

On the strength of my own experience, I offer here an eight-point program which can be followed by every person capable of some resolution, some endurance, and some sense of dedication.

## An Eight-Point Program

### 1 Meditation on a Passage

Most of us have grasshopper minds, dispersing our attention, energy, and desires in all sorts of directions and depriving us of the power to draw upon our deeper, richer resources for creative living. Using an inspirational passage for meditation every day, as instructed below, helps to slow down the furious, fragmented activity of the mind so that we can gain control over it. The slow, sustained concentration on the passage drives it deep into our minds. Whatever we drive deep into consciousness, that we become. "All that we are," declares the Buddha, "is the result of what we have thought."

⇒ Meditate for half an hour every morning, as early as is convenient. Do not increase this period; if you want to meditate more, have half an hour

in the evening also, preferably at the very end of the day.

⇒ Set aside a room in your home to be used only for meditation and spiritual reading. After a while that room will become associated in your mind with meditation, so that simply entering it will have a calming effect. If you cannot spare a room, have a particular corner. But whichever you choose, keep your meditation place clean, well-ventilated, and reasonably austere.

⇒ Sit in a straight-backed chair or on the floor and gently close your eyes. If you sit on the floor, you may need to support your back lightly against a wall. You should be comfortable enough to forget your body, but not so comfortable that you become drowsy.

⇒ Whatever position you choose, be sure to keep your head, neck, and spinal column erect in a straight line. As concentration deepens, the nervous system relaxes and you may begin to fall asleep. It is important to resist this tendency right from the beginning, by drawing yourself up and away from your back support until the wave of sleep has passed.

⇒ Then, in your mind, go slowly through an inspirational passage from the scriptures or the great mystics. I usually recommend the Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console,  
To be understood as to understand,  
To be loved as to love;  
For it is in giving that we receive,

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.

⇒ Do not follow any association of ideas or try to think about the passage. If you are giving your attention to the words, the meaning has to sink in. When distractions come, do not resist them, but try to give more and more attention to the words of the passage. If your mind strays from the passage completely, bring it back gently to the beginning and start again.

⇒ When you reach the end of the passage, you may use it again and again until you have memorized others. It is helpful to have a wide variety of passages for meditation, drawn from all the world's major traditions. I recommend chapters two and twelve of the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord's Prayer, the Twenty-third Psalm, the Beatitudes, and the first chapter of the Dhammapada of the Buddha. I have also translated some of the Upanishads for use in meditation. Whatever you choose, the passage should be positive and practical, chosen from a major scripture or a mystic of the highest stature.

The secret of meditation is simple: you become what you meditate on. When you use the Prayer of Saint Francis every day in meditation, you are driving the words deep into your consciousness. Eventually they become an integral part of your personality, which means they will find constant expression in what you do, what you say, and what you think.

### 2 Repetition of a Mantram

A mantram is a powerful spiritual formula which, when repeated silently in the mind, has the capacity to transform consciousness. There is nothing magical about this. It is simply a matter of practice, as all of us can verify for ourselves.

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Every religious tradition has a mantram, often more than one. The name of Jesus itself is a powerful mantram; Catholics also use *Hail Mary* or *Ave Maria*. Jews may use *Barukh attah Adonai*; Muslims repeat the name of Allah or *Allahu akbar*. Probably the oldest Buddhist mantram is *Om mani padme hum*, referring to the “jewel in the heart.” And in Hinduism, among many choices, I recommend *Rama, Rama*, which was Mahatma Gandhi’s mantram, or the longer mantram which I received from my own spiritual teacher, my grandmother:

Hare Rama Hare Rama  
Rama Rama Hare Hare  
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna  
Krishna Krishna Hare Hare

Select a mantram that appeals to you deeply. Then, once you have chosen, do not change your mantram again. Otherwise, as Sri Ramakrishna puts it, you will be like a man digging shallow wells in many places; you will never go deep enough to find water.

Repeat your mantram silently every time you get the chance: while walking, while waiting, while doing mechanical chores like washing dishes, and especially when you are falling asleep. You will find that this is not mindless repetition; the mantram will help to keep you relaxed and alert. Whenever you are angry or afraid, nervous or worried or resentful, repeat the mantram until the agitation subsides. The mantram works to steady the mind, and all these emotions are power running against you which the mantram can harness and put to work.

### 3 Slowing Down

In the modern world we are conditioned to live faster and faster. We are only beginning to see that speed makes for tension, surface-living, and insecurity.

It is not enough to talk about this; we must learn to slow down the pace of our lives. To do this it is a great help to start the day early; that is how you set the pace for the day. Have your meditation as early as possible. Don’t rush through breakfast. Allow enough time to get to work without haste. At any time during the day when you catch yourself hurrying, repeat the mantram to slow down.

In order to slow down, it is necessary to gradually eliminate activities outside your job and family responsibilities which do not add to your spiritual growth. At first people feel at a loss for what to do with the time they save by dropping courses in kite-making and flower arrangement. What we lose in activity we gain in intensity by learning to rest content on each moment. The British poet John Donne says, “Be your own home and therein dwell.” We can find our center of gravity within ourselves by simplifying and slowing down our lives.

It is essential in this connection not to confuse slowness with sloth, which breeds procrastination and general inefficiency. In slowing down, attend meticulously to details, giving the very best you are capable of even to the smallest undertaking.

### 4 One-Pointed Attention

People today split their attention in many ways. Background music while we eat, study, or work prevents us from being fully aware of what we are eating, studying, or working at. Eating or drinking while watching a movie curtails our capacity to appreciate the movie. In all these activities the mind is two-pointed. Everything we do should be worthy of our fullest attention. This is making the mind one-pointed, which means utilizing all its resources.

When you are talking with someone, give him your full attention.

Look only at him. Listen only to him, no matter what distractions come in the way. When you give someone your complete attention, that helps him to give his best attention to you. Gradually, over a period of years, this becomes an effortless pattern of graceful behavior.

### 5 Training the Senses

“Stimulate the senses” is the slogan of the mass media around us. One Western historian goes to the extent of calling our modern civilization *sensate*. Therefore, we have to be extremely vigilant to ensure that we do not come under the tyranny of the senses.

Our five senses are much like puppies. When we let them do as they like, they may end up ruining the whole house. If we train them, they become sensitive, responsive, and free from conditioning. The senses must be obedient if we are to live in freedom. This is not a plea for sense-denial, but for training the senses to be clear and strong. Indulgence blunts the fine edge of the senses, jangles the nervous system, adds to the restlessness of the mind, and clouds the judgment.

In order to train our senses, we have to exercise discriminating restraint over the food we eat, the books we read, the movies we see, the music we listen to, and the places we frequent. Food is an important place to begin. Mahatma Gandhi was fond of pointing out that control of the palate is a valuable aid in controlling the mind. When we misinterpret a sense craving as a hunger signal, we often overload a stomach that is already full. To control such cravings, eat only when hungry and eat temperately. Have a balanced diet, preferably from a variety of whole-food sources, and eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables. Avoid strongly flavored, spiced, overcooked, and deep-fried foods.

### 6 Putting Others First

I place a good deal of emphasis on the family, for it provides countless opportunities every day for expanding our consciousness by reducing our self-will, selfishness, and separateness. Dwelling on oneself always constricts consciousness. To the extent that we put the welfare of others first, we break out of the prison of our own separateness.

When we dwell on ourselves, we build a wall between ourselves and others. Those who keep thinking about their needs, their wants, their plans, their ideas cannot help being lonely and insecure. The simple but effective technique I suggest is to learn to put other people first within the circle of your family and friends, where there is already a basis of love on which to build. When husband and wife try to put each other first, for example, they are not only moving closer to each other; they are removing the barriers of their ego-prison, which deepens their relationships with everyone else as well.

### 7 Spiritual Fellowship

When trying to change our life, we need the support and companionship of others with a similar goal. If you have friends who are meditating along the lines suggested here, you can get together regularly to share a vegetarian meal, meditate, and perhaps read and discuss inspiring, practical spiritual works. Share your times of entertainment too; relaxation is an important part of spiritual living. Who has ever seen a mystic with a sour face?

### 8 Spiritual Reading

We are so immersed these days in what the mass media offer that it is very helpful to give half an hour or so each day to reading the scriptures and writings of great mystics like Saint Teresa and Sri Ramakrishna who have verified the scriptures in their lives. We can cultivate a universal outlook by steeping ourselves in the spiritual awareness of the mystics of all religions, countries, and epochs. Just before bedtime, after evening

meditation, is a particularly good time for such reading, because the thoughts you fall asleep in will be with you throughout the night.



By practicing this eight-point program every day, we can learn “to love the Lord with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might.” It is then that he reveals himself to us in the depths of our consciousness through an act of infinite grace. “He who approaches near to Me one span, I will approach near to him one cubit; and he who approaches near to Me one cubit, I will approach near to him one fathom; and whoever approaches Me walking, I will come to him running; and he who meets Me with sins equivalent to the whole world, I will greet him with forgiveness equal to it.” So says the Sufi mystical document *Mishkat al-Masabih*. Or as they have been saying down the ages in India, when we take one step towards the Lord, he takes seven steps towards us. But this first step we must take. ⇨



# Meditation: Questions & Answers

By Eknath Easwaran

*We hear a lot today about the benefits of meditation. Are there particular benefits to the method you teach?*

THAT'S A VERY HELPFUL question. Today, I think, everyone knows there are physical and emotional benefits to meditation, particularly in relation to stress, which seems epidemic today. In addition, a lot of people have come to me with some serious personal problem, physical, emotional, or spiritual. Here meditation can help directly, and I am gratified to say that I have seen hundreds of students get over a serious problem and go on to lead very beneficial lives.

There is a second category – many of them artists, some of them scientists – who want to release deeper creative faculties that they feel are locked up within them. Everyone has these deeper resources, and here too meditation can help.

But there is a third kind of human being in every country: those who have come to the end of their material tether, who have played with all the toys of life and found that they cannot satisfy the hunger for meaning and purpose in their hearts. It touches my heart very deeply when they come and say, “We want to realize God.”

In all religions the mystics tell us: We are born, grow up, go to school, get jobs, grow old, and pass away even without knowing who we are. So the real purpose of meditation is, first and foremost, to enable everyone – in every country and every religion –

to answer this question for oneself: “Who am I? What is my life for?”

When that question is answered, it brings the realization that you are not separate from the rest of life. Then you feel at home everywhere. When I came to this country, everyone warned me against culture shock. It took me just two hours to feel at home here, and that only because I had to get back my land legs after being so long at sea. Everybody on earth is really very much the same. Outwardly we look different, but when you see behind the physical mask – which is what the word *personality* signifies, from *persona*, a mask – you see that everyone is the same. This indivisible unity of life is the divine ground of existence by whatever term you call it.

*In your books you seem to say that meditation can banish depression.*

LIFE TODAY IS SO fraught with problems that it is natural to feel burdened by them and to doubt one's capacity to deal with them effectively. In such cases, the burden often comes not so much from the problems themselves as from the inability we feel about dealing with them. In such situations, meditation can help decisively by releasing inner resources that are available to all of us but are often hidden by clouds of insecurity and doubt.

Chronic depression, however, is a very different matter. This kind of condition can be life-threatening, and it requires expert attention. In such cases I urge everyone to work closely with a qualified professional, and in particular never to combine this method of meditation with psychoactive drugs. Meditation may seem simple, but we should always remember that we are dealing with the most powerful instrument the world has seen.

*What distinguishes your method of meditation?*

THE METHOD OF MEDITATION I follow is really a program for the whole of the day. All the eight points of this program work together, and all are aimed at the training of attention, both during the period of meditation itself and during the rest of the day.

The value of this is that if you can succeed in training your attention to a great extent, you can deal with most of the emotional problems in life. Little things that should be treated as pin-pricks grow to be serious problems not because they are serious in themselves but because of the continuing attention they receive when we dwell on them. Training attention enables you to turn your attention away from that problem to something more positive, more promising.

In other words, it's very much like changing channels on TV. When you don't like something on TV, you can change to something worth watching – and when you don't find anything worth watching, you can turn the TV off. That is the final achievement in training attention. When our attention is caught in something unproductive, such as worrying or replaying old resentments or regrets, we can just switch the program off.

To change the metaphor, just as you park your car and turn off the engine at the end of the day, you can learn to park your attention. And just as turning off the engine saves gas, when you park your attention, all the vital energy that is used in worrying and dwelling and brooding on the negative aspects of life is conserved. That is why meditation brings more energy, more drive, more confidence that you are up to life's challenges.

The practical benefits of this are immense. Everybody in the world knows that we react to people. If you are angry, I am angry. If you dislike



me, I dislike you. If you avoid me, I avoid you. And my teacher used to say, "Do you want to be like a tennis ball, which obeys the racquet? Don't you want to live in freedom?" Control over your attention brings freedom. You no longer react; you can choose your response. You lose the capacity to be angry against angry people, to move away from people who move away from you. Eventually you even lose the capacity to think negatively, to have any kind of ill will against anybody at all. And as our ancient scriptures say, when all capacity for ill will is gone, what is left is original goodness. When all capacity for hatred is gone, what is left is original love.

*Do I have to change my religion to practice meditation?*

**MEDITATION CAN BE PRACTICED** in every religion, and without professing any religion at all. It is not a dogma or a belief; it is a dynamic, tremendously powerful discipline, a mighty tool that can be mastered by anybody with daring and drive. In fact, I would say that training the mind to be calm, clear, and compassionate under all circumstances is the very essence of religion.

This method of meditation is based on inspirational passages from the world's great scriptures and mystics, so it fits perfectly into any religious tradition. You can choose to meditate on passages only from your religion, but I always recommend using passages from all religions because this lets us see the one supreme reality from different points of view. Every religion has its own point of view.

There is no disloyalty to your own religion in this. I like the reply that Mother Teresa once gave: "I love all religions, but I am in love with my own."

*I'm deeply drawn to the Prayer of Saint Francis, but I have trouble with words like "God" or "Lord" or "divine master."*

**WHEN I TALK ABOUT** God, I am referring to an underlying reality that is closer to me than this body, dearer to me than my life. In every major religion there is a tradition that maintains, on the basis of direct experience, that this spark of divinity is present in every creature. So in meditation, when we repeat the prayer that begins "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace," we are not referring to anybody outside us. We are calling on our deepest Self, which is the same in all.

*Is meditation different from prayer? Some of the passages are prayers.*

**WHEN MOST PEOPLE TALK** about prayer they mean petitionary prayer: making an appeal for help of some kind from outside. Meditation is very different. Even if the words are those of a prayer, such as the Prayer of St. Francis, what we are doing with those words in meditation is not asking for anything from outside, but unifying our attention and turning it deep inward to the source of all wisdom within.

In many traditions, this too is called prayer – a deeper kind or "degree" of prayer distinguished by names like "interior prayer" or "prayer of the heart." But whatever the language, we should always remember that in meditation we are not calling on any agency outside us but within, at the very center of our being. That is why the mystics say that God knows what is in your heart. We don't have to put it into words. When you have a deep longing to go deeper in meditation, that's the best prayer.

*Is meditation the same as yoga?*

**THE WORD YOGA** COMES from a root meaning "to unite." In that sense, yoga is that which unites me with the Lord of Love in my heart. It is both the method and the state of consciousness in which personality is completely united, top to bottom.

When many people use the word *yoga* today, however, they are thinking of the physical exercises called *asanas* in Sanskrit, which are really part of a much larger body of theory and practice that includes meditation. I have benefitted a great deal from these exercises, but if you are practicing the method of meditation I teach, please don't combine it with other methods or with *asanas* that involve controlling the breath or other bodily functions.

*Can anyone meditate?*

**IN PRINCIPLE EVERYONE** CAN learn to meditate, but there are practical limitations. For example, I don't recommend this method for children – say, for anyone younger than eighteen – because a certain measure of experimentation with life is required to learn that nothing outside can satisfy us. If you want to give your children a flying start for when they are ready, I recommend the mantram – and the younger they start, the better.

Even for adults, there are a few who are not in a situation where this method can be practiced safely. As I said, I don't recommend my method of meditation for anyone using psychoactive drugs or living in a controlled environment such as a prison. Other methods may help in such environments, but I can speak only from what I know. Here too, what I would recommend is the mantram, and only when the instructions in my books are followed very carefully.

*Continued on next page*

*How do I choose a passage for meditation?*

**A** MEDITATION PASSAGE IS NOT just a selection of words. When you are following the words with complete concentration, the passage is a powerful instrument for making changes in consciousness of which we are not aware.

In other words, not every passage that appeals to you on the surface level will work beneath the surface of consciousness. That is why I ask everyone to choose from the passages in *God Makes the Rivers to Flow*, which I have chosen very carefully from many, many possible selections to ensure that each one will contribute positively to the transformation of character, consciousness, and conduct.

Some of my criteria are very simple. A meditation passage should be universal, and it must be positive. You may have noticed that in some of the passages I translated for meditation, if there is a negative note in the original it is omitted in my version. These are not just selections for an anthology; they are instruments for making very specific changes in personality. When used in meditation, these are living words full of power. You are driving the passages so deep that the contents of mystical awareness they embody will explode like a depth charge, filling your mind and your life with the highest ideals and the skill to translate those ideals into daily behavior. That is why I always insist that the passage be stamped with the personal experience of a man or woman who has realized God. In *God Makes the Rivers to Flow*, in the few cases where the source is in doubt, you can think of these passages as being offered by me directly.

Again, the purpose of a meditation passage is to provide daily inspiration. If it does not stir you inwardly, don't use it at all. I have been a lover of poetry since childhood, but even

**A Living Teacher**

*Comments from some of Sri Easwaran's latest students, who never met him but find he is a living presence in their lives.*

**I** AM 21 YEARS OLD. When I was 19, I fell into a deep depression. I came across easwaran.org and began to practice passage meditation. I have found a wonderful spiritual teacher . . .

**E**ASWARAN BECAME MY TEACHER right away although I never met him. He came into my heart and stayed.

**E**ASWARAN HAPPENS TO BE the only one whose message goes deep into my heart, and I've been searching for long. For me, Easwaran is very much alive. He "discusses" with me, always giving the answer I need, and I can feel his presence every day in my life.

**S**RI EASWARAN PUT MY life upside down when I started following him. Bhagavad Gita and other holy books became alive, days became meaningful, bitterness and depression fell away from life. I know no other teacher like him, so deeply wise and yet humorous, eloquent and tolerant, seeing the unity of all religions yet totally devoted to Krishna. Words are simply not enough to describe how much I appreciate him.

**I** HAVEN'T BEEN WITH SRI Easwaran for very long, but it seems to me he has always been with me all along.

He is the exact teacher I need, showing me the path to that deep security, love, and joy but never ever pushing me on to it.

Gently, consistently guiding me to the way of the heart, but still letting me make my own choices, standing by me in complete faith that sooner or later I won't need that redirection.

And my heart is ever fonder for having received his love and teachings.

**I** FEEL A CLOSE CONNECTION to Sri Easwaran even though I have never met him in his physical body. I feel as if he is talking directly to me when I read his books. He has given me insight to understand spiritual concepts by talking in language I am able to understand. The teachings are designed for householders and people living busy lives, and the teachings are relevant to modern times. He has given me a direction and purpose in life. He is a great guru.

**H**AVING GROWN UP AS an Evangelical Christian, finding Easwaran was like finally finding the wick beneath the flame. All I knew was fire, but he guided and guides me to the Source, where I find Relationship and Connection with God, nature, people, and my true Self. It is literally a daily blessing to having come to know him. Truly, our Divine Master responded in the most extravagant way to Sri Easwaran's utterance of the Prayer of Saint Francis. And he is still a shining, magnificent instrument of God's peace.

I WAS STUMBLING IN THE dark, trying to find something to hold on to, when by chance (actually, I no longer believe chance) I found Easwaran, or he found me. He has answered every question that no one else could answer and given me so much hope. He reignited my faith in God and belief in religion. The simplicity of his language, his analogies, his ability to provide modern, everyday examples to illustrate ancient truths, his inclusivity of everyone and his gentle humour makes him a perfect guru. I cannot possibly put into words what he means to me.

WHENEVER I HEAR SRI Easwaran – singing mantrams, videos filled with wisdom and light but wise humor, through the words in his books – every time, I catch myself smiling at how simple and true he makes everything seem. He makes me hopeful and optimistic and ambitious and focused about reaching that goal of being simple and true and loving. He reaches out, holding and supporting as I walk on this difficult path, all the while smiling with his twinkling eyes.

This feeling of truth and the sense of Sri Easwaran goes in only one direction. It grows with you, changing you from inside out.

I REMEMBER ONE MOMENT IN MY young adult life when I rolled up the windows of my car and literally cried out to the Universe, to Jesus, to God, for help. There was a big ordeal going on in my head. Yet after I had let it all out, I wouldn't have been able to explain to you or to myself what it was that I was crying out for.

To me Easwaran was help sent to guide me to what it was that I cried out for. He speaks in a language I can understand. He awakens the possibility of making gains towards this place, regardless of what I think. He shows me the steps. He steps aside when my ignorance has its way. When I return, he continues instruction where we left off. When all is unsure and dark, his tender voice brings back light. When I fumble, he assures me that it is a time of celebration in my heart. He changes languages when I'm ready. I hear him clapping, warming his hands with bright enthusiasm saying, "Ahhhh, there's nothing on the face of the earth like meditation!"

EASWARAN CAME ON MY path by grace. I changed direction, and Easwaran is my teacher to show me that direction. I don't think guide is an appropriate word, as I believe God is guiding. But he is a teacher: a wise, kind, warm and loving teacher, whose spirit lives in his words and through us, following his path. I am eternally thankful to him from the bottom of my heart. His teachings are a profound help and big part in my life, a source of strength, wisdom, comfort, courage, kindness, love and clarity I constantly draw on and it never fails. It's become the foundation of my life. The eight-fold path is my guide for living and I become more secure, strong and solid with it. Thank you, dear Easwaran. It's felt in my heart.

beautiful poetry may not be appropriate. Just because a passage is beautiful or dramatic does not mean it is suitable for meditation.

Last – but definitely not least – the passage should be thoroughly practical. It should express values that can be translated into daily living with great benefit to yourself, your family, and your community. This is a quality not easily found. Poetry and practicality need not always go together; profundity and practicality need not always go together. Many scriptures in the great religions do not lend themselves to daily practice. If you ask me, for example, how to get over anger, I can tell you: one, two, three, four. If you ask how to get over greed, I can tell you: one, two, three, four. That's the kind of practice that is essential.

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*How do I choose a spiritual teacher?*

THIS IS A COMMON difficulty today, with so many people offering to be spiritual teachers and meaning different things by what they promise.

Here again my answer would be very practical. In choosing a stockbroker, for example, we don't choose just anyone in the Yellow Pages. We look up their records, ask people who have done business with them, study what I imagine they call their "philosophy of investing" to see if it makes sense to us. If we take so much trouble in choosing a stockbroker, I think we should take at least equal trouble in choosing a spiritual teacher. We don't really embark on the spiritual path until we have chosen, but this kind of preliminary exploration is essential.

Don't be misled by robes or external paraphernalia. I see hundreds of people misled by that. Instead, always compare what a person teaches with how he or she lives. Someone who is really aware of God will never do anything selfish, never

*Continued on next page*

*Continued from previous page* exploit others, never discriminate against others, never try to accumulate personal profit or prestige. Most important, such a person will never try to get you to do something that you feel is immoral. Gandhi was very fond of a hymn that said, "Lord, please give me love and devotion, but don't deny me common sense."

When you find a teacher you want to follow, you will need to move closer as your commitment deepens. This is not a matter of geography. There are some people in whom there is a window open in their consciousness, who have played with the toys of life and grown tired of them. When people like this come to me and listen to my voice or watch my videos, they say they want to move closer and closer and closer.

The retreats we offer are for this purpose, as well as the many books and the video and audio recordings of my talks that we have published. If I had had these books to read when I was beginning, how much it would have helped me! I wrote them because I needed such books and I didn't find them anywhere. There is not a page in them that is not based on practical experience.

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

The main thing is that you should have unified love and respect for your teacher. The barrier is not physical or geographical. You have to remember that when I started to meditate, my own spiritual teacher, my grandmother, had already passed away. At

first I felt very much on my own, but at every stage, when I turned to her for guidance, I found answers to my questions, often by remembering something she had said or done. I have no hesitation whatever in saying that her presence is every bit as real to me today as the so-called realities of material existence. She is more real to me than she was when she was in her body – much more alive to me, much more real to me, than most of the people I know.

The love between student and teacher is completely spiritual. It is non-physical, non-material. That is why the Hindu and Buddhist sages say that even death cannot separate the student and the teacher. It is a tremendous promise, but there have been many examples in the annals of mysticism where this has been proved to the satisfaction of sincere seekers.

My teacher and I are one because we loved each other so passionately, so endlessly, that we became one. It is possible for all of us to attain this supreme state by extinguishing self-will, which is the only thing that could separate my grandmother from me or you from your teacher or anybody else.

One of the best ways of deepening the relationship with your teacher, therefore, involves the relationship between self-will and loyalty. Often, in my early days, I did not see the wisdom of my grandmother's attitudes and answers in important matters concerning my life. My vision was really rather fogged intellectually. Yet even though my intellect used to tell me that my view was more likely to be correct, I had such love for my grandmother and such loyalty to her that I found it easy to subordinate my opinions to her wisdom – which, of course, proved over and over to be greater than my own. This has always helped me find greater clarity in a difficult situation.

The relationship between the teacher and the disciple in India has a

great bearing on this question. I don't think my grandmother needed my love for her security. But the more I gave of my love to her, the less the barriers between her and me, which meant that I was able to enter into the recesses of my consciousness by the love I was giving her. The more self-will I removed, gate after gate in consciousness used to be opened for me by my own love. It wasn't her love that did that; it was my own love and loyalty. This is how I began to understand from my own experience why the scriptures always emphasize complete love and loyalty to the teacher. It is so that we may open gate after gate after gate in consciousness until finally the seventh gate is opened and you and your teacher are one.

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*You speak of the dangers of meditation. Is one of those dangers having more than one teacher or more than one method of meditation?*

**T**O BORROW THE WORDS of Sri Ramakrishna, having more than one teacher or more than one method of meditation is like digging too many wells at the same time. You won't get water anywhere at all.

One reason for this is rather subtle. In meditation, what we are trying to do is slowly unify consciousness. That is the root meaning of the word *yoga*. Trying to follow more than one teacher or more than one method is just the opposite of this. Most people will find an initial period of exploration necessary, but the spiritual journey only begins when we select a teacher and resolve to follow his or her method of meditation without reservations.

But to answer your question, it is not just a matter of not making progress. Here we are getting into very dangerous ground. Most of the activity in meditation is below the surface of

consciousness, where combining instructions can be combustible without our even being aware of what is happening.

To take just one example, there are powerful breathing exercises which are followed in the great monasteries of the Himalayas. Very stringent conditions are applied because such exercises are intended to be practiced in environments where food and air are pure and the mind is completely protected from sensory stimulation. When these conditions are not met, even simple-seeming disciplines as breathing exercises can damage the nervous system without one even being aware of what is happening. I have seen cases of this myself. That is why I never recommend any kind of breathing exercises to anyone trying to follow my method of meditation.

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*You caution us to stay at thirty minutes when starting out. Is it harmful to start out at a longer period?*

**T**HAT'S A VERY IMPORTANT question. I tried to work this out during the days when I was teaching at my university, and I discovered that less than thirty minutes is not enough time. It's like physical exercise. I'm told we are supposed to exercise thirty minutes to get aerobic. My personal observation is that we need thirty minutes of concentrated meditation to get the mental aerobic effect.

But this is a case where more time is not better, and in some cases it can be dangerous. What takes place in meditation is not just going through the words of the passage slowly. When concentration is deep, all physiological processes can be slowed down, and the pressure may be more than your nervous system can take. Again, this is from personal observation of many, many students. I have seen a few people who, in their enthusiasm, disre-

garded these instructions and got into serious trouble. There are other dangers too. That's why I say that if you want to meditate longer, meditate half an hour in the morning and then another half-hour in the evening.

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*What about unusual experiences in meditation, such as strange thoughts or sensations?*

**K**NOWING THE MIND, I can assure you that it has a number of aces up its sleeve. The day you start to meditate seriously, the mind knows it is going to be told to listen to you, and the mind doesn't like that at all. It may do its best to distract you with sensations such as nausea or an overwhelming urge to cough or other, more outrageous phenomena. In such cases, the very best strategy is to give more attention to the inspirational passage. When you give more attention to the words, you will not pay attention to these distractions. That's the answer.

The inspirational passage, let me keep repeating to you, is your safety net. Never let go of the inspirational passage whatever the temptation or the difficulty. Ignore all distracting phenomena and keep your mind on the passage. On a deeper level of consciousness there is a kind of Alice's Wonderland on either side where you cannot distinguish between fancy and fiction. This can be quite harmful, so it is best to be scrupulous about holding on to the passage right from the beginning.

One reason we may find lights and sounds and so on intriguing is that we take them for evidence of progress. Something is happening! Beneath my gentle ways, however, I am a very hard-nosed mystic. I'm not impressed by supernatural experiences; I look for changes in character and conduct. How selfless can you be? Can you restrain your senses when necessary? Can you go against your self-will

when it benefits those around you? How long is your span of attention? These are the signs of progress in meditation.

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*How about overwhelming emotions that come up during meditation?*

**W**E SHOULD NEVER FORGET that meditation is a superb discipline – and the emphasis is always not on superb, but on discipline.

Even in the early years of meditation, there are many times when waves of emotion can sweep over us. That is the time to concentrate more and not to observe the emotion or analyze it, either during meditation or during the day. Don't try to bask in the emotion or wallow in it. I think it is Catherine of Siena who warns that in such cases we can be like a bee that is caught in its own honey. When you are able to concentrate even more on the passage during a wave of emotion, it becomes a valuable aid. You are able to harness it – not consciously, but because it is absorbed into your concentration. Instead of letting it act as a deterrent, it becomes a valuable factor in your progress.

Even after meditation, some of the backlog of such experiences may follow you into the day. Don't dwell on them, don't describe them to others, don't write about them. Every time that wave of emotion comes up, repeat the mantram.

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*Does this mean suppressing emotions?*

**M**EDITATION DOES NOT AIM at removing emotions. You can turn every negative emotion into positive. Anger, fear, greed, and other destructive emotions are power that can be transformed and harnessed for going forward. So don't

*Continued on next page*

*Continued from previous page* think that you have to get rid of your emotions. What you have got to learn is to be in the driver's seat and not let your emotions drive you.

With meditation, over a long, long period, every emotion is brought under control. This puts you in the driver's seat always, so that you will never be swept away. That is why I emphasize over and over that you should keep your foot near the brake and both hands on the steering wheel, and your vision should be completely clear. Years ago, when Christine and I were driving through the beautiful scenery of Arizona, we passed a tall tree by the side of the road on which there was a sign. I looked up and read, "You should be watching the road." In meditation you should have all your attention on the passage. The moment you find you have lost the words, get back to the passage.

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*I want to make a difference. Does meditation help the world, or only me?*

**F**IRST AND FOREMOST, MEDITATION on an inspirational passage drives the ideals of that passage deep into consciousness, where tremendous resources are waiting to be brought up to the surface and harnessed in selfless service. That is the principle of meditation: we become what we meditate on.

As you know, before I took to meditation I was a very literary type of chap. My world was mostly the world of letters. I was never an unkind man, and I don't think I harmed anybody at all, but most of the time all that I was concerned about was literature. But I had some fleeting awareness of the unity of life, and when I came across suffering it really used to shatter me. It would haunt my dreams. What made it so thoroughly despairing was my inability to relieve it. I did have a desire to contribute to life; many of us in those

days, inspired by Gandhi, wanted to make some contribution to a free India. But I knew I didn't have the capacity. It was after I took to meditation that I realized there are resources in each of us that can be of benefit to a lot of people. The deeper you go, the greater the resources, and with that will come greater opportunities for service. The condition is that these resources be used in living for others. Otherwise that bank will be closed for you and the check will bounce.

Many of the young people that I ran into in Berkeley in the early days had high ideals. It took a while to discover that not all people with high ideals are ready for the spiritual life. I had a natural inclination to look upon a person doing selfless work as capable of spiritual disciplines. It's a very favorable atmosphere, but the desire to go against personal desires comes ultimately through what in traditional language is called grace. That is what I mean by the window in consciousness being open.

In those days, I was so simple in my faith that I really thought we would be able to get meditation practiced in all the churches in Berkeley. I discovered to my great discomfiture that they were not even prepared to give us a place to meet. But I still hope that by the end of the century there will be a much greater number of people who are ready for the spiritual life, which for me begins with the training of the mind – meditation and the mantram. Then we can help to change the whole pattern of our civilization, which is so obsessed with pleasure, profit, and possessions. I have good reason to believe that even one person who meditates and is able to be at peace with himself and others can influence everyone around.

You must have heard the illustration that if you toss a stone into water, the ripples will spread on their own. When I started this work in 1960, I

remember speaking on the Upanishads to a full room in a bookstore in San Francisco. They seemed so responsive to my presentation that I decided to give instructions in meditation. Then I started meditating, and within a few minutes I had lost awareness of the outside world. When I opened my eyes, there were only three people left in the room: myself, my wife, and the owner of the bookstore, who had to wait before she could lock up.

That was the first pebble that was thrown. Obviously there were no ripples! But years later, when I was invited to teach the theory and practice of meditation at the University of California, Berkeley – the first credit course in meditation, I believe, ever offered at an accredited university in the West – we had a thousand students and thirteen dogs. We had to stop registration because the hall wouldn't accommodate more. And it wasn't just talk; they were all meditating except for the dogs.

In other words, even though we may not see it, the ripples of selfless work do spread. That is why I feel I have concrete evidence now that even a few good, energetic, loving people practicing meditation will be able to bring about salutary changes in our country and our society very quietly, without claiming any credit at all.

Actually, if you look at the work of the Blue Mountain Center, you will see it has only one root. I just want to reduce suffering. I want to release people from the great burden of suffering that comes to everyone today, whether rich or poor, by showing everyone how to transform anger into compassion, ill will into good will, and hatred into love. I don't go in for demonstrations, but according to the Buddha, the real activists are those who banish anger and greed and hatred and violence from the human heart. ☺

# Passage Meditation Retreats in 2013



Dillon Beach, where Easwaran took daily mantram walks. All our retreats at our retreat house in Tomales include a mantram walk here.

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# BLUE MOUNTAIN



A JOURNAL FOR  
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#### **In Tomales, California**

*March 22–24: Returnee Weekend  
April 5–9: Senior Half-Week  
April 20–26: In-Depth Weeklong  
May 17–19: Introductory Weekend  
June 7–9: Returnee Weekend  
July 6–12: In-Depth Weeklong + Young Adults  
August 3–9: In-Depth Weeklong  
August 16–18: Introductory Weekend  
August 23–27: Senior Half-Week  
September 21–27: In-Depth Weeklong  
October 4–6: Returnee Weekend  
October 12–18: In-Depth Weeklong  
November 8–10: Young Adult (18–35)  
Weekend  
November 15–17: Introductory Weekend  
December 6–8: Returnee Weekend*

#### **Across the US**

*April 12–14: Oregon (Mt. Angel) Weekend  
April 13: Oregon (Mt. Angel) One-Day  
June 21–23: New York (Ossining) Weekend  
June 22: New York (Ossining) One-Day  
August 2–4: Colorado (Golden) Weekend  
August 3: Colorado (Golden) One-Day  
September 7: San Diego One-Day  
September 27–29: Chicago Weekend  
September 28: Chicago One-Day*