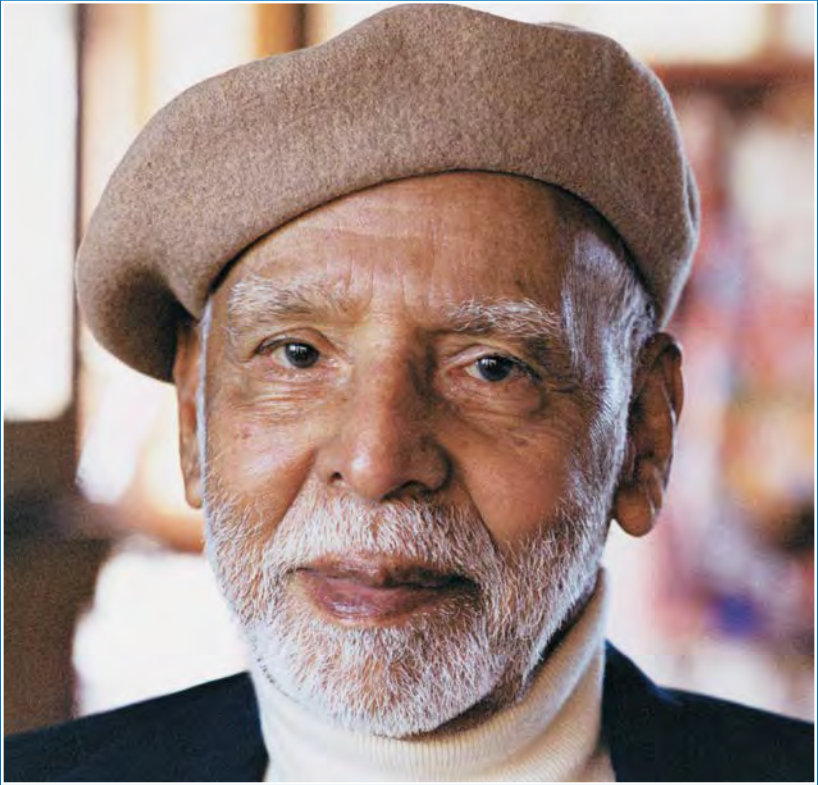


Eknath Easwaran's

Blue Mountain Journal

Meditation and Spiritual Living



Spring/Summer 2017

Turning Ideals Into Action
The Spiritual Challenge



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In This Issue

One of the first things Eknath Easwaran did after founding the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation was to start a little publication “to carry his words to a wider audience than his voice can reach” – a purpose so important that we wrote it into our bylaws. It seems even more important today, when his audience extends around the world and he is no longer present in the body to guide us.

With this issue, as planned, I am passing this precious responsibility to our chief editor. A dedicated meditator with a deep understanding of Sri Easwaran’s work and teachings, Sue has worked closely for over ten years with the editors Easwaran and I trained since 1970. I feel confident that in her hands, his words and message will continue to reach readers around the world, who still tell us that he speaks directly to their needs.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christine Easwaran".

Christine Easwaran
For the Board of Trustees

From the BMCM Editorial Team

As Christine has said, the Blue Mountain Journal has for decades been a way for Easwaran to speak to us directly. When we have been facing challenges – personal, national, or global – we have turned to his timeless wisdom to help us find our way forward.

This year we received many messages from BMCM friends, asking what Easwaran would say to them right now. Faced with the current political and social developments, how should they live out their ideals? What constitutes wise action? Where would Easwaran want them to place their efforts and their energy? We went back to our archive of Easwaran’s writings to draw out his answers. And since the BMCM includes an international community of long-time passage meditators, we asked some of those friends to tell us how they are applying Easwaran’s teachings in 2017 – in California, Nigeria, India, and Australia.

Easwaran’s message is unshakably consistent, an expression of the eternal wisdom that he holds before us as our goal. That wisdom can be found in two of Christine Easwaran’s favorite verses from the Bhagavad Gita. We’re closing with those verses as heartfelt thanks for her ongoing, loving guidance for us all.

“They alone see truly who see the Lord the same in every creature, who see the deathless in the hearts of all that die. Seeing the same Lord everywhere, they do not harm themselves or others. Thus they attain the supreme goal.”

Chapter 13, v 27–28

Sue, and the BMCM Editorial Team
For the Board of Trustees



Easwaran, 1960s

Hold On to Your High Ideals

Having lived in the world of young people for more than half a century, I have had ample opportunity to observe that there are two driving needs for which there is no provision at all in our modern civilization.

First, our young people have no lofty example, no glorious image of the human being to look up to, nothing higher than the pursuit of personal profit and pleasure.

And second, there is no soaring ladder by which young people can harness their daring and determination to climb from this low image of human beings as merely physical, fragmented, finite creatures to the magnificent image that has been proclaimed in all the great religions of the world.

The world's great mystics have made the centuries echo with their clarion call that life is only given to us for one single lofty purpose: to turn inwards and discover – while on earth, while in this life – that no amount of money, no amount of material possessions, no amount of pleasure and prestige will ever satisfy this desperate need for realizing the Lord of Love, who is enthroned in the hearts of all.

The tragedy of lost ideals

When I was teaching English at a great university in India, I had a close relationship with many of my students. They would ask me questions not only about literature but also about many of the problems of life that young people face everywhere. Most of them really wanted to contribute to life, to leave the world a little better than they found it.

Yet many years later, when I would run into them on a

railway train or in a theater, I was often taken aback – not by the loss of hair which some had undergone, but by the loss of their ideals.

It is appalling to see what the passage of time can do to the idealism of youth. Many of these students who had really betrayed themselves and their noble aspirations were reluctant even to look at me. It used to break my heart to see how they had lost their ideals under the influence of family obligations, peer pressure, social expectations, or the desire for money or material things.

I think this is the greatest tragedy that can happen to a human being, when a man or woman loses sight of the vision that all young people have by virtue of their innocence and gets caught in the feverish obsession with personal satisfaction that is the driving force behind our modern civilization.

In my opinion, millions of people are unhappy, insecure, frustrated, even desperate, because they are making demands on life that are impossible for life to fulfill. Life cannot give happiness to a selfish person; it is impossible. Life cannot give security to a self-willed person; it is impossible. I am prepared to go to the extent of saying that life cannot even give optimum health to those who live for themselves, forgetting their natural idealism in the pursuit of self-centered goals.

Conversely, life cannot help giving fulfillment to those who turn their backs upon themselves to give to others, to contribute to life without any thought for themselves. This is what makes the whole human personality light up from within.

“This is not what you want!”

Ideals need to be nourished; otherwise they gradually recede from view as attention is claimed by personal desires. Finally our ideals are pushed into the unconscious, out of our waking awareness.

But that does not make them disappear. They cry out all the more for our attention, and if they are ignored, they can cause all kinds of problems. Like the red light on the dashboard of a car, these are signs that something is wrong, and until it is attended to, the warning is going to get more and more insistent.

Researchers have been observing this for years. One study of executive stress back in 1985 involved psychiatric interviews of three hundred successful, sophisticated men and women with high-level careers – journalists, doctors, scientists, business people, bankers, lawyers, government officials, the kind of professionals we might find on Wall Street, in Silicon Valley, or at any prominent campus or corporation.

These were people with money, prestige, power, everything they had been seeking in their careers. Yet they reported emotional problems ranging from profound dissatisfaction, boredom, burnout, anxiety, and anger to psychosomatic disorders and drug addictions. They felt “hollow inside.” One man described himself as facing “spiritual death, a withering of the soul.”

To me, this is the proof that money and power are not our need, that the human being cannot be satisfied with physical extravagance. These successful careerists had everything, yet wanted something more. On the surface they were thinking about themselves, about what would



Easwaran and Christine, 1980s

foster their career and get them what they wanted from life. But below the conscious level, the mind was screaming something very different: "This is not what you want! You want to give, you need to serve, and you are not getting the opportunity."

For such people to be reporting free-floating anxiety was a strange comment. They felt as if the ground was slipping beneath them, the earth was opening, nothing was firm, nothing seemed solid, they had nothing to hold on to. To the mystics of all religions, the diagnosis is simple: "You are trying to hold on to things that cannot support you. You are pursuing things that cannot bring you fulfillment. The only way to support yourself is by holding on to yourself and slowly releasing your grip on the things outside you that you think can prop you up."

The researchers also found "tremendous rage." This follows naturally from self-betrayal. Anger is the unavoidable outcome of desires that cannot be satisfied. Some of these troubled professionals were consciously aware that they had betrayed themselves by turning their backs on their ideals.

This is not a negative account for me. It is a very positive account, for it means that we have reached a critical landmark in our evolution when spiritual growth becomes essential. When life has reached a meaningful frontier on the physical level and legitimate material needs are satisfied, we have to turn towards a higher image of the human being to evolve.

If this does not take place, a society slowly turns upon itself.

Ideals in practice

I am a very hard-nosed person. I don't get taken in by words and speeches professing high ideals. I ask, "How are you spending your time? What are your main preoccupations? How many pastimes consume energy and resources which you could be using to help others?"

This is what ideals are about in practice: not what you say or what you write but how you order your life, how you apportion your time, how you distribute your resources, how you behave in everyday relationships. I don't even go by financial contributions. I look at a person's life, at the way his mind works, the way she goes through the whole day.

Many of the careerists in those interviews worked in service professions. But the Buddha would remind us to look at the mental state involved. By thinking only about themselves, they ended up in an interior world where values dear to them had been ignored.

Meister Eckhart, a great mystic of medieval Europe, made a pithy remark: "In order to be what you want to be, you have to cease being what you are." It's a painful reminder but a necessary one. Ideals are merely ideas until we translate them into daily life – and that means learning to go against the conditioning that urges us to put ourselves first instead.

Where meditation shines

Today we often hear that the best way to help the world is for each of us to change ourselves. But I wonder how many really understand what this means. It implies much more

than changing lifestyle. We need to go on changing and improving our thought-style.

It is true that when we drive less, for example, we are contributing to cleaner air. And it is true that such examples spread, and that big changes consist of many individual choices. But that is only the surface. Every decision you make for others, against your own conditioning, sets in motion changes deep in personality. Deeper resources are released that will find new opportunities for selfless service.

That is why, whenever I see somebody changing herself to be kinder or more selfless, my heart leaps in delight. That person is changing the world a little, leaving it a little better than before.

This is where meditation shines. In meditation we have the mightiest tool for changing our personality completely. And the marvel of it is that every way of thinking that you've been conditioned to, every way of speaking, acting, and living, can be changed into the perfect image of your highest ideals.

In this sense, meditation can be presented as armor that can protect anyone from the siren call of social pressure and the mass media to ignore their ideals and throw their lives away in living for themselves.

Come home to your ideals

That is why I teach meditation. I am all ears when somebody says, "I don't know how to be kind. I don't know how to release deeper resources to make my life count." I say, "I can teach you!" That is what meditation is for. Memorize a passage on kindness, memorize a passage on goodness,

and then drive it inwards. You will become kind; you will become good.

In practice, the spiritual life means remaking personality to reach the highest ideals that have been bequeathed to humanity by great teachers in all the world's major religions. When you meditate on passages from the world's great scriptures and mystics, you are filling your mind with the highest ideals a human being can aspire to.

Everyone can learn to do this. If you are one of the great majority of human beings who have allowed their ideals to get vague around the edges, meditation can sharpen and strengthen them. Simply refreshing these ideals in meditation can bring an immediate sense of relief, as if coming home again after a long absence or finding something precious you had lost and forgotten.

A deep desire to serve

Many people have come to me to ask my opinion of what career they should pursue. I always told them, "Don't ask what you want to do. Don't ask what will pay the best salary or what promises the most prestige. Ask what the world needs that you can offer." For those who are just setting out in life, I would appeal to you to choose a career that gives your ideals the fullest room for expression.

At the beginning, it need not matter what your occupation is so long as it is not at the expense of life. Whether you are a concert pianist or an athlete, a teacher or a clerk, it is possible to embody the highest ideals in your character and conduct.

As meditation takes root in your life, however, greater opportunities will come. A great many people who have

Her Heart is Full of Joy

Saint Teresa of Avila

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

come to me in the course of this work have found, as their meditation deepened, that unsuspected faculties for service began to flow into their hands. Some found ways to channel these resources into existing jobs; others found new opportunities opening for them, such as a volunteer position in community service. One way or another, such opportunities will come the way of everyone with the deep desire to serve.

Many of these people responded by finding work in health care or education, where high ideals are precious. But a few chose to help me with their careers, not only basing their lives on meditation but sharing the work of the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation. This lofty calling is rare, but in every generation, I feel sure, a few will arise who want to help carry the precious gift of meditation to millions of others around the world.

The greatest contribution

All this is work that the world needs desperately. Now that the Blue Mountain Center is getting to be known and respected, I hope to reach millions of people with the message that life is not for getting but for giving, and that through this mighty tool of meditation everyone can fulfill the ideals they cherish most.

This is the greatest contribution anyone can make. As the Buddha reminds us, those who help to banish greed, anger, and fear are the greatest activists in the world. I don't think anybody was more of an activist than Jesus or the Buddha. Thousands of years later, their words still reach us, reminding us to train our minds, purge our consciousness of selfish passion, extinguish our self-will, and put the needs of others before our own.

Great spiritual teachers like these are the highest embodiment of ideals that belong not to any religion or culture but to the world. Unconditional love, compassion, forgiveness, are everyone's ideals, simply by virtue of our being human.

Such luminous figures *are* their ideals. They and their ideals are one. When you give such a person all your love and loyalty, you are dedicating yourself to your own highest ideals. There is no higher way of translating ideals into daily life.

And this is how ideals are spread. You don't have to talk about them or put a sticker on your car that says "You're following an idealist." Ideals in action in daily living are the very foundation for peace, the very basis for love, the very fulcrum for selfless service and a better world.

A reader comments:



One of my take-homes from a retreat I attended in 1998 is Easwaran's admonition to define an overriding goal in life. Since then, I have been carrying a pocket picture of Easwaran on which I have a sticky with the phrase "Define an overriding goal." And what is that overriding goal of life enjoined by the sages and Easwaran? It is "The realization of the Lord of Love," who is enshrined in the hearts of all in this lifetime.

To strive to achieve an overriding goal, all lesser ones must be subordinated. Easwaran told us that achieving this ultimate goal is akin to swimming against the fiercest current. Sri Krishna says, "Drawing upon your deepest resources you shall overcome all difficulties through my grace.... If you say 'I will not fight this battle' your own nature will drive you into it. If you will not fight the battle of life, your own karma will drive you into it." So, this ideal of "The realization of the Lord of Love" is the ultimate goal and the road, the sages say, is less travelled. To realize it we must be ready to fight the ultimate battle.

The opposing forces on that road – self-will, greed, anger, fear – are primordial, which Easwaran says are lurking in the very depths of the unconscious. They just pop up at their will. To fight the battle, we need a road map based on the experience of sages that have resolutely travelled the path. That road map Easwaran has distilled in the eight-point program on meditation and the allied disciplines.

To me the spiritual wisdom distilled by Easwaran in the eight-point program is the ultimate ideal, the ultimate wisdom. It

helps to transform conduct and character to gradually and proudly ascend the height of the "Radiant World Soul" which is full of splendor and beauty and full of life.

However, as Easwaran said in this article, without an indomitable will "the irresistible conditioning of society sucks us into this whirlpool of personal pursuits." I started using the eight-point program when we, my family and I, came to the US between 1996 and 1999 on work assignment. When we returned home my sister-in-law assured my wife not to worry, that the euphoria will soon pass over me, giving the example of her close friends who had followed the Hare Krishna movement when it was introduced to Nigeria, I think, in the early seventies. That made me double my efforts, having realized the gradual progress being made on the spiritual path.

Since then, the practice of meditation and the allied disciplines has been an inseparable part of my daily living. Now I am giving back by teaching mathematics at a nearby high school. We start each lesson by discussing how to live life to the fullest. I gave them the phrase our high school principal gave us at graduation in 1975:

*When wealth is lost, nothing is lost,
When health is lost, something is lost, but
When character is lost, all is lost.*

My prayer is that I do not wane in this ultimate pursuit.

– Adewale, Nigeria

Radiant Is the World Soul

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook

Radiant is the world soul,
Full of splendor and beauty,
Full of life,
Of souls hidden,
Of treasures of the holy spirit,
Of fountains of strength,
Of greatness and beauty.

Proudly I ascend
Toward the heights of the world soul
That gives life to the universe.

How majestic the vision –
Come, enjoy,
Come, find peace,
Embrace delight,
Taste and see that God is good.

Why spend your substance on what does not nourish
And your labor on what cannot satisfy?

Listen to me, and you will enjoy what is good,
And find delight in what is truly precious.

A reader comments:

Shri Easwaran says in this article that “In order to be what you want to be, you have to cease being what you are.” That has been the recent story of my life.



I am an entrepreneur with a successful, fulfilling business working with foreign direct investors coming into India. Yet a few years ago I felt a little dissatisfied. I realized that I could be working on this business till the day I dropped dead.

I wanted to have a life with meaning and purpose. My son and daughter were adults and didn't seem to need me so much. The business I was running didn't seem to need me that much either. While I was thinking what to do, I carried on being very regular in my passage meditation practice, which I had established in my 30s.

Then, on a weeklong retreat at the BMCM in Tomales, it dawned on me, far away from home and my normal routine, that what I needed to do was to give back to Indian young people the gift that I had received in my 30s. I'd met many young women who wanted to become like me – a so-called successful entrepreneur balancing home and work in a way that they thought they would like to do. I decided to use my influencer status for meaningful work, and to dedicate the rest of my life to creating young women leaders in the world.

But to become the kind of person who gave freely of my time, sharing whatever little knowledge and experience I had, meant stopping being an over-anxious mum to my own son and daughter and letting go control of my business. The fine balance has been to love my children and be around when they need me, without worrying about them.

I am humbly proud to say that in the past couple of years we have been able to touch the lives of 15,000 young people in India through our Foundation work. Over 9,000 of these are college students where we spent time going over emotional intelligence tools, chiefly passage meditation. I've had the privilege of introducing the passage meditation program in short keynote speeches to many women's colleges.

All this has been possible only because of my own practice – disciplined reading and re-reading of The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living, meditating on passages such as "The Way of Love." Whether I am in an aircraft or a car, at home or in a hotel – when meditation time comes, I draw to a halt, and together with my husband, who now meditates with me, we go over the words of the inspirational passage.

Shri Easwaran came from India bringing the tools to the west. And now India needs his tools more than ever before. Make me a humble instrument of his peace.

– Ranjini, India

The Way of Love

The Bhagavad Gita

That one I love who is incapable of ill will,
And returns love for hatred.
Living beyond the reach of I and mine
And of pleasure and pain, full of mercy,
Contented, self-controlled, firm in faith,
With all their heart and all their mind given to me –
With such as these I am in love.

Not agitating the world or by it agitated,
They stand above the sway of elation,
Competition, and fear, accepting life
Good and bad as it comes. They are pure,
Efficient, detached, ready to meet every demand
I make on them as a humble instrument of my work.

They are dear to me who run not after the pleasant
Or away from the painful, grieve not
Over the past, lust not today,
But let things come and go as they happen.

Who serve both friend and foe with equal love,
Not buoyed up by praise or cast down by blame,
Alike in heat and cold, pleasure and pain,
Free from selfish attachments and self-will,
Ever full, in harmony everywhere,
Firm in faith – such as these are dear to me.

But dearest to me are those who seek me
In faith and love as life's eternal goal.
They go beyond death to immortality.



On a Young Adult retreat



Easwaran with one of his dogs, 1980s

Make Peace Your State of Mind

“Peace,” according to Spinoza, “is not an absence of war. It is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, trust, and justice.”

From this one quotation, you can see how far beyond politics the mystics’ definition of peace goes.

There is a vital connection, they assure us, between the peace or violence in our minds and the conditions that exist outside. When our mind is hostile, it sees hostility everywhere, and we act on what we see. If we could somehow attach a monitor to the mind, we would see the indicator swing into a red danger zone whenever consciousness is agitated by forces like anger and self-will. Acting in anger is not just the result of an agitated mind; it is also a cause, provoking retaliation from others and further agitation in our own mind.

In order to do effective peace work, to reconcile individuals, communities, or countries, we have to have peace in our mind. If we pursue peace with anger and animosity, nothing can be stirred up but conflict.

I knew hundreds of students in India during Gandhi’s long struggle for independence from the British Empire. I met hundreds more in Berkeley during the turbulent sixties, when students all over the country were honestly trying to work for peace. I watched their relationships with one another, especially with those who differed with them, and I saw that these relationships often were not harmonious. If your mind is not trained to make peace at home, Gandhi would ask, how can you hope to promote peace on a larger scale? Until we develop enough mastery over

our thinking process to maintain a peaceful attitude in all circumstances – a “disposition for benevolence” – we are likely to vacillate when the going gets tough, without even realizing what has happened.

After some of those demonstrations that were capturing headlines, I used to remind my friends that agitating for peace and actually bringing it about are not necessarily the same. Stirring up passions, provoking animosity, and polarizing opposition may sometimes produce short-term gains, but it cannot produce long-term beneficial results because it only clouds minds on both sides. Progress comes only from opening others’ eyes and hearts, and that can happen only when people’s minds are calmed and their fears allayed. It is not enough if your political will is peaceful; your entire will should be peaceful; the whole of your personality should be nonviolent.

The meaning of nonviolence

It is a living law, a law governing all of life, that ends and means are indivisible. Right means cannot help but lead to right ends; and wrong means – waging war, for example, to ensure peace – cannot help but result in wrong ends. Gandhi went to the extent of telling us to use right means and not worry about the outcome at all; the very laws of our existence will ensure that the outcome of our efforts will be beneficial in the long run.

“Select your purpose,” he challenged, “selfless, without any thought of personal pleasure or personal profit, and then use selfless means to attain your goal. Do not resort to violence even if it seems at first to promise success; it can only contradict your purpose. Use the means of love

and respect even if the result seems far off or uncertain. Then throw yourself heart and soul into the campaign, counting no price too high for working for the welfare of those around you, and every reverse, every defeat, will send you deeper into your own deepest resources.”

If we grasp this great truth – that the Lord lives in each and every one of us, regardless of who we are – we will never be discourteous to others, we will never be unkind, we will never try to avoid people, we will always be glad to work in harmony with those around us. Then it becomes impossible to quarrel, to be angry, to hurt others, to move away. This doesn’t mean weakening your convictions or diluting your principles. Disagreeing without being disagreeable is one of the arts of civilized living.

This is what Gandhi means by nonviolence, and he calls it the most active force in the world. You don’t retaliate, you don’t retire; you just stand where you are, firmly rooted – rooted in wisdom, rooted in love, unshakably kind in the face of criticism, opposition, calumny, or slander.

Use kind words

If life offers so many opportunities to practice this today, it is because all of us have been so conditioned to focus on ourselves. Because of this, we have become so impatient that we burst out at the slightest provocation – not only mentally, not only verbally, but with our heart, our lungs, our whole nervous system. Not to be provoked, not to be frightened, not to retaliate requires a lot of stability inside so that these passing storms do not upset us.

Most of us refrain from lashing out physically when we are provoked, but I think our whole society would benefit

immensely if we could all learn to use kind words. During my stay in this country, extending almost half a century, I have seen a sad deterioration in the way people express their opinions and frustrations. Millions of people today believe that unkind, hurtful language is a necessary part of communication.

I feel very deeply, but I never use an unkind word. I have very strong convictions, but I never express them in language that would be harmful. I think it is Gandhi who pointed out that those who get angry when opposed or contradicted have no faith in themselves. When you have faith in your convictions, you won't get angry. I can listen to opposition with sympathy, and yet I will stand by my own convictions whatever the opposition is.

Nothing we do could have a more beneficial influence on those around us than remaining calm and considerate in the midst of ups and downs. It's a challenging career that lasts a lifetime, and there are opportunities every day. When people are impolite to you, that's the time to be exceptionally polite. When people are discourteous to you, that's the time to be more courteous.

A first aid measure

In situations like these, one first aid measure is to leave the scene and take a mantram walk. The force of your anger will drive the mantram deeper, bringing you closer to the day when you can rise above those fierce negative forces.

Each repetition of the mantram, especially in trying moments, is like money put into a trust account in the Bank of Saint Francis. One day that account will mature, and you will become an instrument of peace. You may have no idea

Khatum

Hazrat Inayat Khan

O Thou,
Who art the Perfection of
Love, Harmony, and Beauty,
The Lord of heaven and earth,
Open our hearts,
That we may hear Thy Voice,
Which constantly cometh from within.
Disclose to us Thy Divine Light,
Which is hidden in our souls,
That we may know and understand life better.
Most Merciful and Compassionate God,
Give us Thy great Goodness;
Teach us Thy loving Forgiveness;
Raise us above the distinctions and
differences which divide us;
Send us the Peace of Thy Divine Spirit,
And unite us all in Thy Perfect Being.



Practicing a skit on the BPCM Family Program

of what capacity you will serve in: after all, Francis himself hadn't a clue to the direction his life would take when he began placing stone upon stone to restore the chapel at San Damiano. But you can be sure that the banker within will provide you with enough compassion, security, and wisdom to make a creative contribution to solving the problems of our times.

Peace as a skill

This "disposition for benevolence, trust, and justice" which Spinoza defines as peacemaking flows from that very aspect of our nature which is not part of an animal heritage, but distinctly human. It is a skill, a skill in thinking, and like any physical skill – swimming, skiing, gymnastics, tennis – it can be learned by anyone who is willing to practice.

This approach should have immense appeal today. We know how to teach computer programming and coronary care nursing. The mystics tell us simply to do the same with peace: to approach it as a skill which can be systematically learned if we apply ourselves to the task.

When we first set out to learn this "disposition for benevolence," of course, the going will be rough. The conditioning of stimulus and response, "an eye for an eye," is strong. But as meditation deepens, you find there is a fierce satisfaction in letting go of your own way so that things can go someone else's way instead. Gradually you develop a habit of goodness, a hang-up for kindness, a positive passion for the welfare of others. In terms of emotional engineering, you are using the mind's enormous capacity for passion to develop the power to put other people first: and not just verbally, but in your thoughts and actions as well.

Eventually kindness becomes spontaneous, second nature; it no longer requires effort. There is nothing sentimental about this quality, either; kindness can be as tough as nails.

We can see in the life of Gandhi how he developed this disposition for kindness. Even as a young man in South Africa, he wrote that he was unable to understand how a person could get satisfaction out of treating others with cruelty. Yet this attitude was not enough in itself to prevent him from reacting with anger when provoked. It took years of practice to drive this conviction so deep that it became an integral part of his character, consciousness, and conduct.

Uneducated minds

Why do we feel we have to lash out against others? The mystics give a very compassionate explanation: because we have uneducated minds. If the mind acts unruly, that is simply because we have not put it through school.

This kind of education is scarcely available anywhere in the world today. I have had the privilege of being associated with great universities both in this country and in India, and I deeply wish that in addition to educating the heads of their students, they could teach the skills that enable us to educate our minds and hearts. It is what we know in the heart, not in the head, that matters most; for what we believe, we become. "As a man thinketh in his heart," the Bible says, "so is he."

Gaining access to the will

For most of us, intellectual knowledge has very little say in the choices that shape our lives. You may know in painful detail about the harmful consequences of smoking, but if you have ever smoked, you know how shallow that knowledge is when measured against the power of habit and desire.

In the Midst of Darkness

Mahatma Gandhi

I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever changing, ever dying, there is underlying all that change a living power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves, and re-creates. That informing power or spirit is God. And since nothing else that I see merely through the senses can or will persist, He alone is.

And is this power benevolent or malevolent? I see it as purely benevolent. For I can see that in the midst of death life persists, in the midst of untruth truth persists, in the midst of darkness light persists.

Hence I gather that God is Life, Truth, Light. He is Love. He is the Supreme Good.

Similarly, you may know from bitter experience how destructive anger can be, but that makes it no easier to keep your temper the next time something provokes you. The reason is simple: there is very little connection between the intellect and the will.

Intellectual knowledge is on the surface of consciousness; addictions, urges, and conditioned cravings arise deep in the unconscious mind. And the vast majority of us cannot bring our will to bear in the unconscious; even in waking life, the will may have little to do.

When you reach a certain depth in meditation, however, all this changes. You gain access to the will even below the surface of awareness, which means you can actually get underneath a craving or negative emotion and pull it out. After decades of sustained effort, you finally get to the roots of the primordial drives that take their toll on the lives of every one of us: self-will, anger, fear, and greed.

Anger as a positive force

Let me change metaphors to make a practical illustration. All these forces – anger, for example – can be thought of as powerful physical forces like electricity. Electricity can destroy us, but when harnessed, it can also bring us light and warmth. In the same way, we can learn to use anger as a positive force, devoid of any ill feeling, to heal divisions between persons and nations and to find creative solutions to conflicts. When we have gained mastery over our responses, when deepening meditation brings insight and creativity, when will and desire have fused into a passionate determination to act only for the good of all, we have simply to flip a switch to redirect the current into its new channel.

To do this takes a great deal of preparation, of course. The mind has to be trained to listen to you when all it wants to do is turn tail and run, or lash out in retaliation. The muscles of the will have to be made strong enough to reach for that switch when everything in you is screaming, "You're wrong!" This takes a lot of work, but the day will come when, in the heat of a conflict, you will be able to say quietly, "Let's look at this problem together and see what we can do to solve it."

In presenting the connection between meditation and peace, then, I am not advancing moral or ethical arguments. I am presenting the dynamics of acquiring a new disposition of mind.

Through the practice of meditation and its allied disciplines, every one of us can become a peacemaker by making "a disposition for benevolence" our natural state: that is, by teaching the mind to be calm and kind.

A reader comments:

I've found that there are many opportunities in daily life to cultivate the disposition Easwaran is telling us about. The next time you're in a public place, enveloped in a sea of humanity – airports, theaters, subways and buses are great for this – pay attention to how our minds as thought-factories are prone to hyperarousal, intrusive thoughts, and evaluation/judging, reacting to Name and Form, especially if we're in a new or unfamiliar place. See how long you can suspend this process, particularly the tendency to compare yourself with others, to criticize and even politicize The Other.

Notice how strong is the mind's push against the "disposition for benevolence," quite separate from any behavioral tendency and even in spite of one's avowed social/cultural values and interpersonal ethics. (We're all kind, reasonable people, right?)

But over time, with meditation and observing how the mind works against our deeper, truer Self, we can evolve our capacity for non-conceptual awareness and reduce habits of evaluative processing, releasing tremendous reserves of compassion. And guess what? In so doing we're fostering more self-compassion as well.

– Tom, Ohio



The Blessing of a Well-Trained Mind

The Dhammapada

As an archer aims his arrow, the wise aim their restless thoughts, hard to aim, hard to restrain.

As a fish hooked and left on the sand thrashes about in agony, the mind being trained in meditation trembles all over, desperate to escape the hand of Mara the Tempter.

Hard it is to train the mind, which goes where it likes and does what it wants. But a trained mind brings health and happiness. The wise can direct their thoughts, subtle and elusive, wherever they choose: a trained mind brings health and happiness.

Those who can direct thoughts, which are unsubstantial and wander so aimlessly, are freed from the bonds of Mara.

They are not wise whose thoughts are not steady and minds not serene, who do not know dharma, the law of life. They are wise whose thoughts are steady and minds serene, unaffected by good and bad. They are awake and free from fear.

Putting Anger to Work: The Bear

Anger is a powerful force. It can destroy us, or – if we can learn to harness its tremendous energy – it can light up the world with love, forgiveness, and faith. This is the practical meaning of Francis’s lines, “Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith.”

These are not abstract ideas; they are living realities that we can draw on in any situation. Perhaps I can illustrate with a small event from my own life.

It occurred when my wife and I were living on the Blue Mountain in India. One afternoon, we went to visit a friend on the other side of town. As we walked through the bazaar on the way to his place, we saw a large, noisy crowd milling about. In the center of the crowd stood an awkward, poorly built cage with a thoroughly miserable bear slumped on the floor. His coat was mangy; he seemed not to have eaten for days; and there was so little room in the cage that he could barely turn around. The bear’s owner was circulating among the onlookers, collecting money.

Deeply disturbed, we walked on to our friend’s house and took him back with us to see the bear. He was a kind man, always sensitive to the suffering of animals; we hoped he might help us find some solution to the problem. When he got there, he could scarcely control his rage. No matter what we said, his grim response was, “I am going to shoot the man who is torturing that bear.”

I had never seen him so upset. Our efforts to calm him had no effect; I was beginning to think his threats might be more than just sound and fury. Finally I convinced him to wait until I had given it a try. He was skeptical, but he agreed.

That afternoon, I went to the bazaar and found the bear's owner resting in the shade near the cage. I sat down by his side, and we exchanged a few polite words. He asked me where I came from. His eyes lit up when I told him I was from Kerala, where we are very fond of bears. "That's a nice one you've got there," I remarked. "Had him for very long?"

"Oh, he came as a young fellow."

"He seems a bit depressed," I said. "Do you suppose he needs some exercise?"

"Oh, yes," he said slowly. There was a note of apology in his voice, as if the question were already weighing heavily on him. Then he fell silent again, perhaps waiting for the inevitable reproach. When I too was silent, he went on. "I wish he had a bigger cage, but I can't afford it. I've got a family to support."

We talked for a while. When I took my leave, I went to see a carpenter who lived nearby. I told this man about the bear and about his owner's predicament, and he agreed to make a nice middle-class bear-house – not just an adequate cage, but a comfortable home – for only a nominal fee.

Then I went to see a lumber merchant. He seemed a little surprised to see a professorial type like me buying wood for a bear cage, but before long he was on the same bear wavelength. As I left, he said with a grin, "This is probably the only bear in India that will be living in a teak house."

Finally I went back to my friend, who was reasonably well to do, and said, "I have asked you for two days. Well, if you'll provide the financial resources, the bear will have a beautiful, spacious house by the end of the week."

My friend was quite surprised. "What happened?" I told him the whole story. I don't think I have ever seen him happier. "How did you do all this?" he asked as he wrote out the check.

"I was as angry as you that the bear should be treated so cruelly, but I put my anger to work. With the power of my anger, I arranged for a new house for the bear and won over the owner – and I won you over, too." "Touché," he said, laughing.

The carpenter was very skilled, and in his enthusiasm to help the bear, he worked overtime to make a beautiful little teak house, with lots of room to move about. When we took this bear-house to the bazaar, it was hard to tell who was more pleased – the man or his bear. They stayed for a few more days before moving on to another town, and I must confess that I went every day to the bazaar to watch that bear striding back and forth. To my loving eyes he seemed to be saying, "Thank you – how good of you to put your anger to work."

A reader comments:

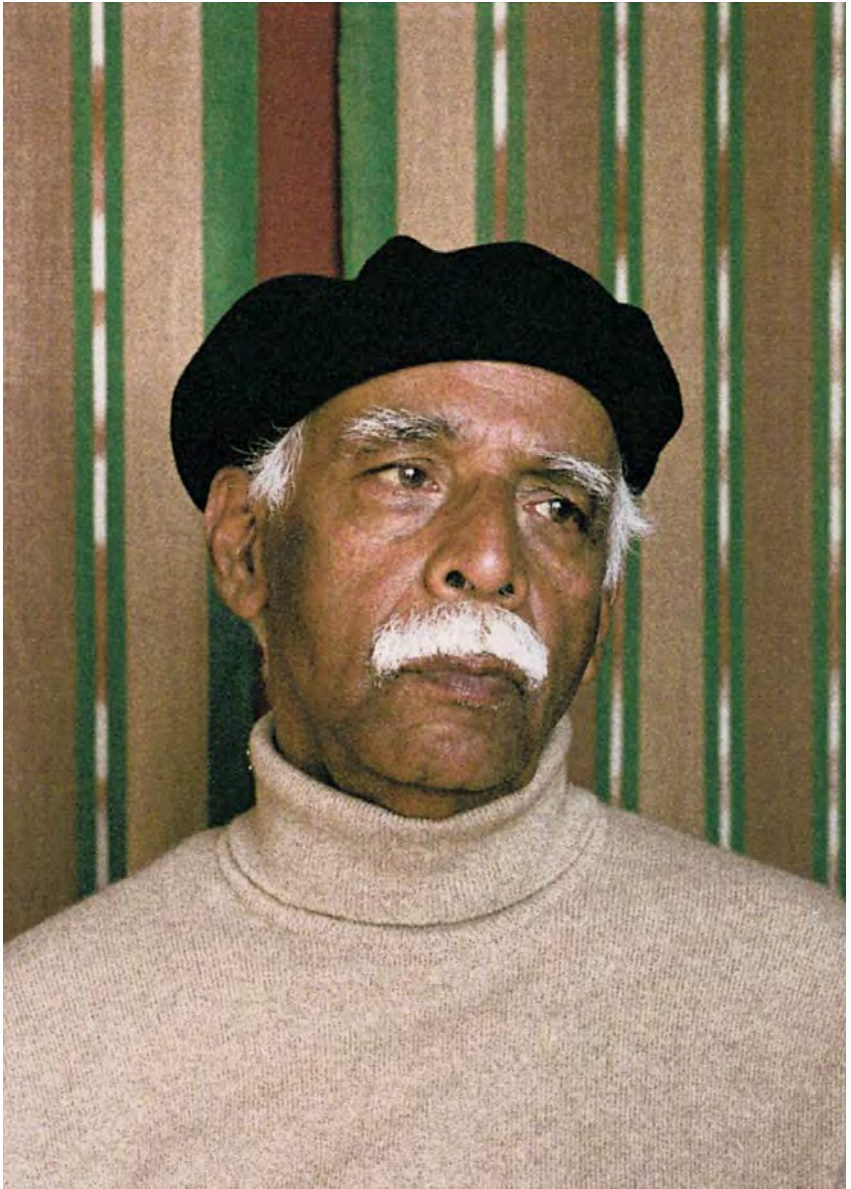


This story is a touching example of how we're better able to help when we're equipped with faith and a calm mind. In a situation rife with anger and suffering, Easwaran calmly reached out to those concerned. His love united people who were seemingly at odds to join in a solution that brought joy to all concerned.

Easwaran has taught me to notice when I feel anger rising, and to stop myself from saying anything hasty at those times. I wait for a sense of detachment from the situation before responding. When I first began meditating, I literally waited years for the detachment to speak to a co-worker about an uncomfortable situation between us. After years of practicing Easwaran's teachings, I see that often my sense of equilibrium returns much more quickly.

This approach to anger has given me the freedom to work comfortably in groups. I recall a time in my 20's when I had such a strong aversion to someone who joined a nonprofit group I was in that I felt compelled to quit the group, in which I'd invested many years. I believe that today I'm much more patient, and enjoy working in groups at my job, on the board of my homeowners' association, in a voter service group, and with our local satsang. A calmer mind is enabling me to reap the rewards of serving and belonging.

– Stephanie, California



Easwaran, 1980s

All of Us Are One

One of the surest proofs of spiritual awareness is that you will have respect and concern for all people, whatever country they come from, whatever the color of their skin, whatever religion they profess.

When I was working as a professor in India, one of the responsibilities I enjoyed was attending graduations. Located near the geographic center of the country, my university drew students from all over India – Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs, and Christians, dark-skinned Tamils from the far south, fair-skinned Pathans, Ladhakis with Oriental features, and every shade of difference in between. Graduation was a colorful affair, as much a celebration for me as for any of my students – a crowning achievement we had worked for together.

Invariably, that unity in diversity would remind me of another graduation perhaps five thousand years earlier. The Chandogya Upanishad, one of the most ancient of India's scriptures, tells the story of a young man named Shvetaketu who has just graduated from one of ancient India's "forest academies" and returns home to tell his father what he has learned.

"You seem to be proud of all this learning," the father tells his son. "But did you ask your teachers for that spiritual wisdom which enables you to hear the unheard, think the unthought, and know the unknown?"

"Well, no, Father," Shvetaketu confesses. "They never mentioned such a thing. What is that wisdom?" And his father proceeds to tell him, in one of the most luminous and lyrical passages in the annals of mysticism anywhere:

"As by knowing one gold nugget, dear one, we come to

know all things made out of gold – that they differ only in name and form, while the stuff of which all are made is gold – so through this spiritual wisdom, we come to know that all of life is one.”

Look around at the gold ornaments people wear. They appear different – necklaces, earrings, bracelets, pendants – but all of them are made of the same gold; it is only the shapes and sizes that differ. Similarly, Shvetaketu’s father is telling him, though people may be white or black, golden or red or brown, tall or short, Western or Eastern, all of us are one.

It is so simple to understand: what hurts you hurts others. You wouldn’t like anybody to tell tales about you. You wouldn’t like anybody to speak unkindly to you. You wouldn’t like anybody to provoke you. That is all we have to remember – yet it is something we always forget.

“You are that”

“My teachers must not have known this wisdom,” Shvetaketu says, “for if they had known, how could they have failed to teach it to me?” He is being very nice about his teachers. “Father, please instruct me in this wisdom.”

“Yes, dear one, I will,” his father replies. “In the beginning was only Being, one without a second. Out of himself he brought forth the cosmos and entered into everything in it” – into everybody, father and mother, son and daughter, friend and enemy, you and me. “There is nothing that does not come from him. Of everything he is the inmost Self. He is the truth; he is the Self supreme. You are that, Shvetaketu; you are that.”

This is the refrain of the story, repeated over and over

to drive it home: “*Tat tvam asi*, You are that” – that divine essence from which all creation came. Not only are all of us one, but each has the same spark of divinity at the core of our being. The Sanskrit scriptures call it simply Atman: the Self.

This is not just an Indian idea; it is the essence of mysticism everywhere. In each of us there is an essential core that cannot be shaken by any circumstance, that time cannot change, that death itself cannot reach. If we could only be aware of that in every moment, what a difference that would make in our daily lives!

A defect in our vision

“As bees suck nectar from many a flower,” the father continues, “and make their honey one, so that no drop can say ‘I am from this flower or that,’ all creatures, though one, know not they are that One.”

In other words, separating people on the basis of superficial differences – race, religion, gender, age – is a kind of optical delusion. Discriminating against others on any pretense whatever shows a defect in our vision. It is because our vision is false that there is racial discrimination, exploitation, and war. That is why the Buddha says the greatest service any of us can render is to correct people’s vision – not by preaching, but by personal example.

There is a good deal of compassion in this approach. People who are unkind simply don’t see others, don’t see the rights of others. People who are selfish are blind to the needs of others. People who think only about themselves are suffering from myopia.

We don’t blame people for being short-sighted; we

encourage them to correct their vision. In fact, we are all half blind because we behave towards other people not as they are, but as we think they are – what the Upanishads call “name and form.” We respond to them according to how they appear to us. We like people because of their form; we dislike people because of their form; we cling to people because of their form; we move away from people because of their form. It’s a simple but far-reaching way of accounting for why we lack in kindness or respect to those around us: we are really not seeing them; we are seeing our own images of them, projections we make of them in our own minds.

Unshakably secure

The same spark of divinity – this same Self – is enshrined in every creature. My real Self is not different from yours nor anyone else’s. The mystics are telling us that if we want to live in the joy that increases with time, if we want to live in true freedom independent of circumstances, then we must strive to realize that even if there are four people in our family or forty at our place of work, there is only one Self.

This realization enables us to learn to conduct ourselves with respect to everyone around us, even if they provoke us or dislike us or say unkind things about us. And that increasing respect will make us more and more secure. It will enable us gradually to win everybody’s respect, even those who disagree with us or seem disagreeable.

When the sages talk about “realization,” what they mean is making this Self a reality in our daily living. We have to practice it in our behavior. Never talk ill of others, they are saying, even if they have faults; it doesn’t help them and

it doesn't help you. Always focus on the bright side of the other person: it helps them and it helps you. Work together in harmony even if you have serious differences; it will rub the angles and corners off your own personality.

Then you will never feel lonely, you will never feel deserted, you will never feel inadequate; you will be unshakably secure. Interestingly enough, this gradually makes those around us more secure too.

With difficult people

The Upanishads tell us these words should “enter the ear.” They shouldn't just beat about the lobes; they should go in – and not just in through one ear and come out the other; we should let their wisdom sink into the mind. Then, the Upanishads say, “Reflect on them”: learn to practice these teachings in your daily life.

When we see people who are difficult to work with, for example, that's the time to practice. Instead of avoiding such people or quarreling with them, why not try to work with them? Why not work in harmony and try to support them?

This doesn't mean conniving at weaknesses, and it doesn't mean we have to say yes to everything they do or say; that's a wrong conception. To connive at somebody who is not living up to his responsibilities not only doesn't help the situation; it doesn't help that person either.

Seeing the Self in those around us means supporting them to do better – again, not through words, but through unvarying respect and personal example. It is this unwavering focus on the Self in others that helps them realize its presence in themselves – and in us and others as well.

Make divinity a reality

It is relatively easy to see the Self in others when they agree with us. It becomes difficult when they criticize us or do the opposite of what we want. But contrariness is part of life. We come from different homes, went to different schools, have been exposed to different influences, hold different views; it is only natural that we differ in all kinds of ways.

Yet these differences amount to no more than one percent of who we are. Ninety-nine percent is what we have in common. When we see only that one percent of difference, life can be terribly difficult. When we put our attention on the Self in others, however, we cease dwelling on ourselves, and that opens our awareness to the much larger whole in which all of us are the same, with the same fears, the same desires, the same hopes, the same human foibles. Then, instead of separating us, the one percent of superficial differences that remains makes up the drama of life.

We can try to remember this always: the same Self that makes us worthy of respect and love is present equally in everyone around us. When we base our relationships on this unity, showing unwavering respect and unconditional love to all, we give them – and ourselves – a sure basis on which to stand. Everyone responds to this. It is one of the surest ways I know of to make our latent divinity a reality in daily life.

A reader comments:



I've always appreciated when Easwaran describes the supreme spiritual goal as seeing the "unity of life." Though he also describes it as extinguishing self-will, or making the ego zero – it's this vision of unity and inclusiveness that has felt especially pressing to me over the past six months.

I love that in this excerpt about unity he uses the Chandogya Upanishad, a particular favorite of mine. I love Shvetaketu, the young man who comes back from college only to find that his dad is a greater sage than all his teachers, and this passage, which repeats over and over "You are that, Shevtaketu, you are that."

This reminder that I, and everyone around me, are woven into the fabric of the universe has been the key for me in expanding my ability to be inclusive of all.

As Easwaran says in this excerpt, "People who are unkind simply don't see others, don't see the rights of others." The passage, and this excerpt, are a call for me to work hard to be kind to all and to really see and hear every person.

– Lisa, California



You Are That, Shvetaketu

Shvetaketu was Uddalaka's son.
When he was twelve, his father said to him:
"It is time for you to find a teacher,
Dear one, for no one in our family
Is a stranger to the spiritual life."

So Shvetaketu went to a teacher
And studied all the Vedas for twelve years.
At the end of this time he returned home,
Proud of his intellectual knowledge.

"You seem to be proud of all this learning,"
Said Uddalaka. "But did you ask
Your teacher for that spiritual wisdom
Which enables you to hear the unheard,
Think the unthought, and know the unknown?"

"What is that wisdom, Father?" asked the son.

Uddalaka said to Shvetaketu:
"As by knowing one lump of clay, dear one,
We come to know all things made out of clay
That they differ only in name and form,
While the stuff of which all are made is clay;
As by knowing one gold nugget, dear one,
We come to know all things made out of gold:
That they differ only in name and form,
While the stuff of which all are made is gold;
As by knowing one tool of iron, dear one,
We come to know all things made out of iron:
That they differ only in name and form,
While the stuff of which all are made is iron –
So through that spiritual wisdom, dear one,

We come to know that all of life is one."

"My teachers must not have known this wisdom,"
Said Shvetaketu, "for if they had known,
How could they have failed to teach it to me? Please
instruct me in this wisdom, Father."

"Yes, dear one, I will," replied his father.
"In the beginning was only Being,
One without a second.
Out of himself he brought forth the cosmos
And entered into everything in it.
There is nothing that does not come from him.
Of everything he is the inmost Self.
He is the truth; he is the Self supreme.
You are that, Shvetaketu; you are that."

"Please, Father, tell me more about this Self."
"Yes, dear one, I will," Uddalaka said.
"Let us start with sleep. What happens in it?
When one is absorbed in dreamless sleep,
He is one with the Self, though he knows it not.
We say he sleeps, but he sleeps in the Self.
As a tethered bird grows tired of flying
About in vain to find a place of rest
And settles down at last on its own perch,
So the mind, tired of wandering about
Hither and thither, settles down at last
In the Self, dear one, to which it is bound.
All creatures, dear one, have their source in him.
He is their home; he is their strength.
When a person departs from this world, dear one,
His speech merges in mind, his mind in prana,
Prana in fire, and fire in pure Being.

"There is nothing that does not come from him.
Of everything he is the inmost Self.
He is the truth; he is the Self supreme.
You are that, Shvetaketu; you are that."

"Please tell me, Father, more about this Self."

"Yes, dear one, I will," Uddalaka said.

"As bees suck nectar from many a flower
And make their honey one, so that no drop
Can say, 'I am from this flower or that,'
All creatures, though one, know not they are that One."

"There is nothing that does not come from him.
Of everything he is the inmost Self.
He is the truth; he is the Self supreme.
You are that, Shvetaketu; you are that."

"Please, Father, tell me more about this Self."

"Yes, dear one, I will," Uddalaka said.

"As the rivers flowing east and west
Merge in the sea and become one with it,
Forgetting they were ever separate rivers,
So do all creatures lose their separateness
When they merge at last into pure Being."

"There is nothing that does not come from him.
Of everything he is the inmost Self.
He is the truth; he is the Self supreme.
You are that, Shvetaketu; you are that."

"Please, Father, tell me more about this Self."

"Yes, dear one, I will," Uddalaka said.

"As a man from Gandhara, blindfolded,
Led away and left in a lonely place,
Turns to the east and west and north and south
And shouts, 'I am left here and cannot see!'"

Until one removes his blindfold and says,
'There lies Gandhara; follow that path,'
And thus informed, able to see for himself,
The man inquires from village to village
And reaches his homeland at last – just so,
My son, one who finds an illumined teacher
Attains to spiritual wisdom in the Self.

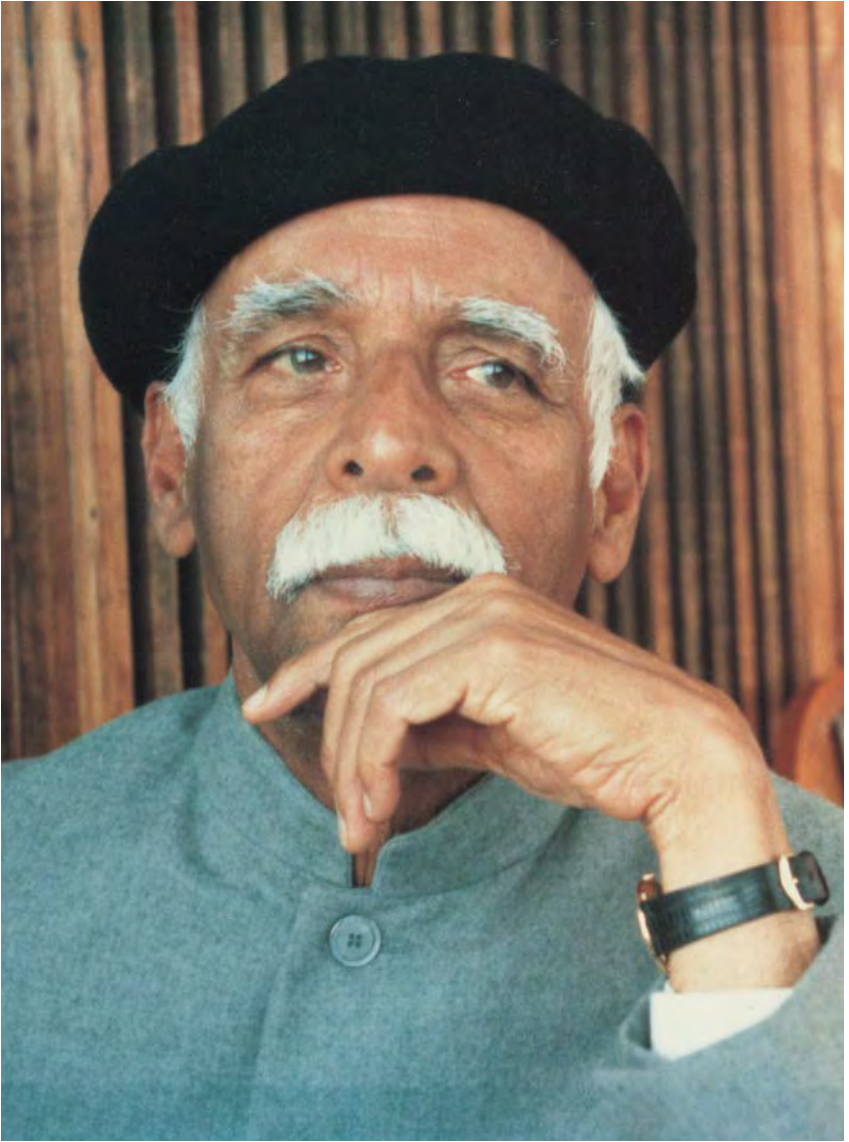
"There is nothing that does not come from him.
Of everything he is the inmost Self.
He is the truth; he is the Self supreme.
You are that, Shvetaketu; you are that."

"Please, Father, tell me more about this Self."
"Yes, dear one, I will," Uddalaka said.
"When a man is dying, his family
All gather round and ask, 'Do you know me?
Do you know me?' And so long as his speech
Has not merged in mind, his mind in prana,
Prana in fire, and fire in pure Being,
He knows them all. But there is no more knowing
When speech merges in mind, mind in prana,
Prana in fire, and fire in pure Being,

"There is nothing that does not come from him.
Of everything he is the inmost Self.
He is the truth; he is the Self supreme.
You are that, Shvetaketu; you are that."

Then Shvetaketu understood this teaching;
Truly he understood it all.

*Excerpts from the Chandogya Upanishad, translated by
Eknath Easwaran in The Upanishads*



Easwaran, 1980s

How to Make Wise Choices

People sometimes ask me, “How can we know what the perspective of the Self is? Let alone identify with it? We don’t even know where to look.” It’s a fair question: after all, most of us seldom look at life from any perspective other than our own. Here there are a number of questions you can ask.

Whom will this benefit?

For one, whenever you are about to do something – or are already in the middle of doing something – that you like very much or that is getting your mind all excited, ask yourself, “Whom will this really benefit?” You may get some rather partial testimony from the ego: it’s all for the other person’s benefit in the long run, simply a coincidence that it’s what you really want too, and so on. But that is the purpose of the intellect, to be a good judge – listen very carefully, ask penetrating and embarrassing questions, and finally render a sternly worded judgment: “This doesn’t benefit anybody, not even yourself.”

This isn’t to say that you shouldn’t care about your own personal benefit. But don’t go exclusively after your personal benefit. Keep the needs of the whole in view; then your own needs are included automatically. When you can do this always, continuously, you won’t even have to think about personal needs; they are taken for granted in the overall picture.

What’s the long-term result?

Second, take a long view of everything. The ego is short-sighted. It can’t see past the end of its nose, because it is



Quiet time on a retreat

all caught up in what it can get for itself right now. But the Self is detached, which means that it can look far down the chain of cause and effect to see the long-term result of every action – not only the result on the doer, but on others too.

Once we get past our early twenties, for example, I think most of us will have burned our fingers enough to draw the conclusion that if we see a flame, we can be reasonably certain that it will burn. Especially where pleasure is concerned, it can be very helpful to ask simply: “What does this promise and what has it actually delivered, to the best of my knowledge?” You can make a ledger and draw your own balance: “One German chocolate cake. Promise: gourmet ecstasy. Delivered: fifteen minutes of sweetness, stomachache, surrealistic dreams, and two pounds of extra weight.” It can help, even with a powerful desire like sex.

But it’s not enough simply to analyze on the surface. You have to look deep within yourself and take a long view to see the total picture: what it promised and what it actually gave, not simply the next day but two years, ten years later.

Will this deepen meditation?

Third, remember Sri Krishna’s injunction from the Bhagavad Gita: “Make Me your only goal.” Everything can be referred to that. Will this deepen my meditation, improve my concentration, make my mind more even, make me less self-centered?” If it will, I will do it; if it won’t, I will not.

“Will this divide my attention, isolate me from others, make me more speeded up, activate an old memory or desire?” If it will, I won’t do it, no matter how pleasant or how innocent it may seem.

Keep the words of the Katha Upanishad always in mind: "What is pleasant is one thing; what is wise is another. The first leads to sorrow, though pleasant at the time. The latter, though at first unpleasant, leads to lasting joy."

Does this help me realize the goal of life?

Then, more subtly, don't allow yourself to be caught in anything. The moment you get caught in a particular activity, detachment goes. Worse, you are that much more cut off from the whole. One small part of life becomes blown up out of proportion, and all the rest shrinks into the background without your even realizing it. It is not possible to see this clearly without an overriding goal, but when you have such a goal, you can measure all your priorities against it.

Look, for example, at the question of physical fitness. Currently everyone seems to be running – not just jogging, but running for several miles every day. Now, I am all for physical fitness; who isn't? It is important for everyone, and it is especially important for those who are meditating seriously. But after all is said and done, running can be only a part of the spiritual life. If this is forgotten, there is the danger of filling your life with running – at the expense of meditation.

Let me make myself clear: I am all for running. But I would apply the same criterion to it as to every other human endeavor: "How much does this help me to realize the goal of life?" That is the measure of its value and the index of its priority.

Next to the entrance to a bridge in San Francisco there used to be a sign with a short message from an Indian

mystic, Meher Baba: "Do your best. Don't worry. Be happy." I suppose many of the businessmen crossing that bridge at rush hour thought Meher Baba was playing Pollyanna. He was not; he was being supremely practical. Worry is usually no more than self-will in one of its more subtle disguises: everything is either "Am I up to this?" or "Is so-and-so going to manage to do this the way I want?"

When you really are doing your best – in your meditation, in the other spiritual disciplines, at work, at home – there's no attention left over for worrying. Then you are beginning to rest yourself in the Lord, the Self, at the very core of your being.

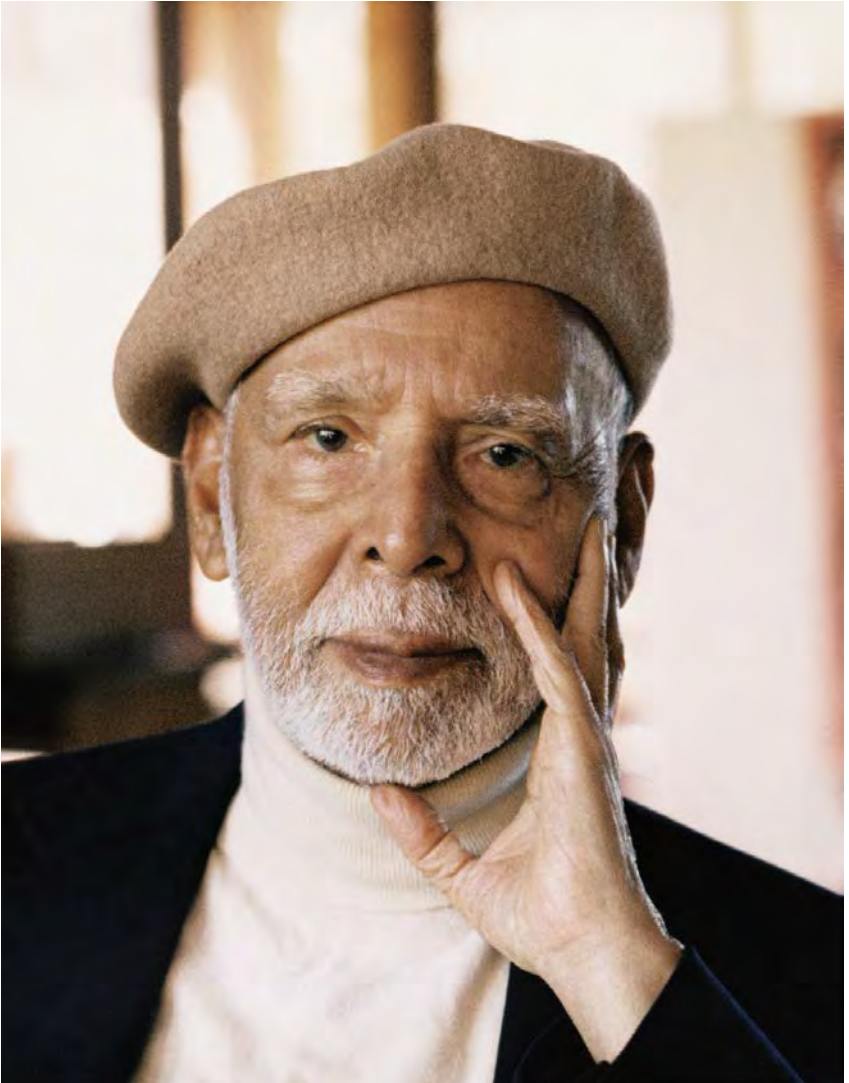
A reader comments:

Easwaran's comment, that we should ask the question: "How much does this help me to realize the goal of life?" and apply this to any activity as "the measure of its value and the index of its priority" really appealed to me.

I sometimes struggle to make decisions when it is not necessarily clear if the outcome is beneficial or non-beneficial. Now when choices aren't black and white, beneficial or not beneficial, I can place decisions on a sliding scale and use Easwaran's "index of priority."

I also find detachment enormously helpful with feelings of "am I up to this" and "is so-and-so going to manage to do this the way I want." Practicing detachment during easier occasions helps to create a habit of detachment I can draw on in more difficult times.

– Kirsten, Australia



Easwaran, 1990s

Ideals Are Living Forces

If there is one thing I would say to the young people of the world, it is this: don't ever lose your ideals. Time has a subtle way of stealing them when you least expect it. Nothing matters so much as keeping the flame alive.

Yet for all of us there is hope. I know from my own experience that it is possible to rekindle that flame, even after the rough winds of life have reduced it to a flicker. It is possible, by the light of that ideal, to make a significant contribution to the health of the world.

To me, ideals are not vague, abstract concepts, but living forces. People who have the daring and determination to live out their ideals release a tremendous beneficial power into their lives, and that power will begin to transform the world we live in. It doesn't so much call for great acts of heroism as for a continuing, persistent effort to transform ill will into good will, self-interest into compassion.

Remember, when we sit down to meditate in the morning, we are not just remaking ourselves. We are remaking our families, our community, our nation, and, in the end, our entire world.

Wednesdays With the BMCM



Advice From Saint Teresa

Even in the midst of work, Easwaran says in this 10-minute video, we can deepen our spiritual practice.

Easwaran is equally at home with the wisdom of the Buddha, or Gandhi, or a mystic like Saint Teresa of Avila. Saint Teresa is a very relatable saint who writes openly about her struggles along the spiritual path. Easwaran says “that is one reason she became such an excellent teacher; she understood deeply the conflicts most of us face, and she knew from her own experience exactly how to deal with them.” In this video Easwaran comments on a text by Saint Teresa, demonstrating how we can use the teachings of a 16th century saint in our everyday lives.

[Watch the video](#) >



[Passage for Meditation](#)

[Her Heart is Full of Joy](#) >

In this short passage, Saint Teresa shows how we can all draw joy and strength from our inner self. This beautiful poem is easy to memorize, and there's something about the female pronouns that makes it a great way to draw closer to Saint Teresa herself.



[From the BMCM Community](#)

[Using Passage Meditation in a Christian Context](#) >

Though passage meditation can be practiced outside of any faith tradition, it can also fit in alongside an existing faith practice. In this story, Josh shares how passage meditation has helped support his personal practice as a Christian and a pastor.

NEW!

Wednesdays With the BMCM

Our weekly email digest, **Wednesdays With the BMCM**, will help keep your practice fresh and vibrant. It's also the best way to learn about the new resources that we add each week to our recently redesigned website, www.bmcm.org.

As we publish new material, we'll send you an email showcasing:

- » **Inspiration from Easwaran** in an audio or video talk, or written article
- » **Tips and ideas** on living out the eight points from our international community of passage meditators
- » **A look behind the scenes** at the BMCM, with stories about news and events from the organization's headquarters.

Each weekly email also includes a collection of curated items such as meditation passages, or clips from Easwaran talks that are related to the main article. Explore our BMCM resources, and take a deeper dive into ideas or topics that you find particularly interesting!

Join over 1,200 international subscribers by visiting www.bmcm.org/subscribe to sign up for free.

We'd love to see you online or in person at a BMCM program!

Are you looking to learn about passage meditation?

- » **“Learn to Meditate” Webinars** (May 20, August 19)
Our free, one-hour introductory webinars are an easy way to explore passage meditation and get your questions answered. There are no prerequisites, and everyone is welcome.
- » **NEW! In-Depth Online Course: Introduction to Meditation** (September 22–November 3)
This six-week online course will give you everything you need to start your practice of meditation, with interaction and support all along the way!
- » **Introductory Weekend Retreats** (June 2–4, September 15–17)
In a group of 15–25 people, you'll take part in interactive workshops and activities designed to help you practice what you learn, and enjoy a replenishing schedule including a visit to the BMCM Headquarters.



Are you looking to deepen your passage meditation practice?

Find inspiration, spiritual fellowship, and a boost to your practice at home or at the BMCM.

- » **Returnee Online Workshops for Passage Meditators** (June 24, November 11)
- » **Returnee Weekend Retreats** (September 8–10, October 6–8)
- » **Weeklong Retreats** (May 6–12, July 8–14 (Cohort + Affiliates), July 29–August 4, August 26–September 1, October 14–20)

Would you like to share with others your age or with a special interest?

- » **Young Adult Retreats (20s & 30s)** (November 3–5, Introductory & Returnee workshops)
- » **NEW! “Living Out the Eight Points with Children” Online Workshops** (May 7, October 1)
- » **Senior Retreats** (August 11–15)

Our retreats have a sliding scale, and some online programs are free of charge.

www.bmcm.org/programs * 800.475.2369





Ideals in action in daily living are
the very foundation for peace,
the very basis for love,
the very fulcrum for selfless service
and a better world.

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