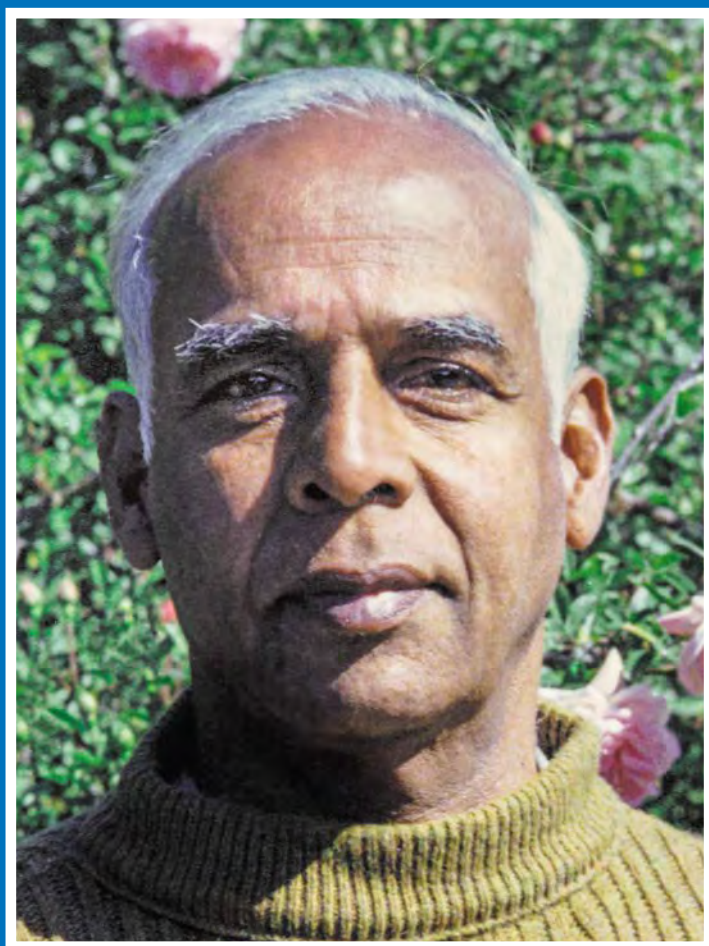


Ekknath Easwaran on Meditation & Spiritual Living

Blue Mountain Journal

FALL | WINTER 2018



Do You Know Who
You Really Are?

In This Issue



In the previous issue of the journal we shared some of Easwaran's writings on the impact of technology on society today. He points out that our faith in technology is intimately linked with an image of ourselves as purely physical beings whose problems

can all be solved by science. The consequences of this limited self-image are bleak:

Never has a civilization reflected a lower image of the human being: a physical, chemical organism with no motivation higher than self-interest, no aspirations that cannot be fulfilled on the physical level.

Even though we may be much more advanced in science and technology than ancient India, I would have no hesitation in maintaining that the civilization of ancient India was a much higher one, because it identified with a higher image of the human being.

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The *Blue Mountain Journal*
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Mountain Center of Meditation,
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organization founded in 1961
by Eknath Easwaran to carry
on his work.

As always, Easwaran shows us a
shining way out of our predicament:

When I was enabled, after
years of meditation, to
discover who I am, the
joy of that discovery knew
no bounds.

This issue explores how, through meditation and the eight-point program, we too can find out who we really are. Easwaran sets the scene with this story of his granny:

The great mystics of all religions are anonymous instruments. We know nothing about them. That is their glory.

But one thing we do know: they discovered who they are.

My own spiritual teacher, my grandmother, wouldn't even answer when we tried to get her to talk about her past. It didn't matter to her. And when I would tell her excitedly about some new luminary in my world, she would ask just one question: 'Does he know who he is?'

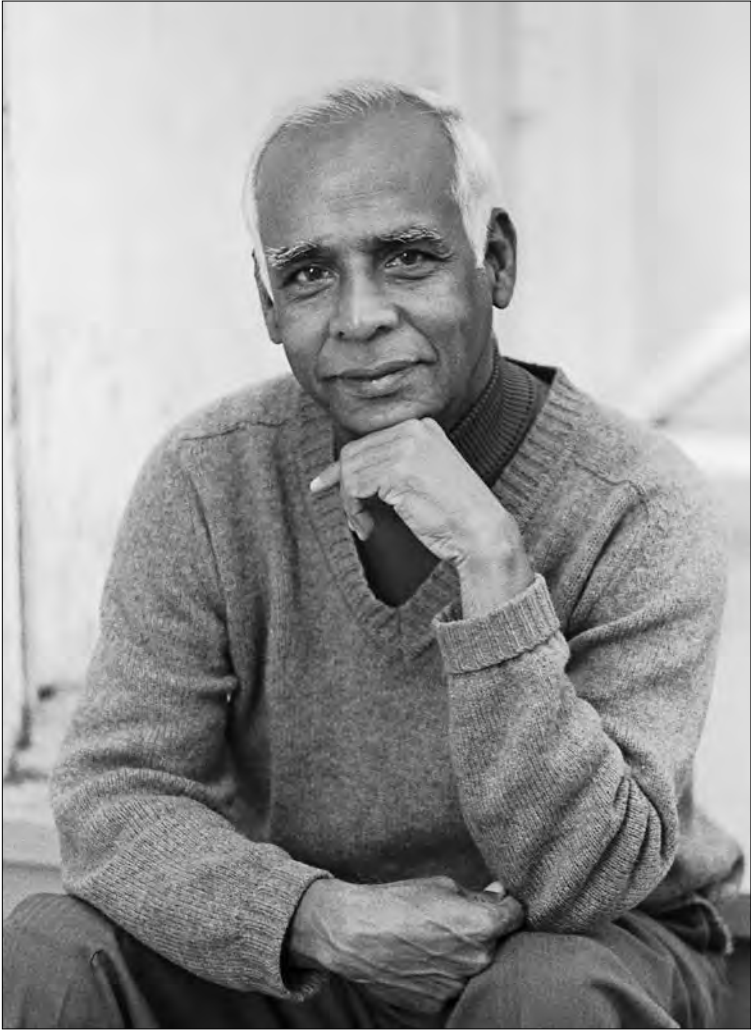
It could be anyone. If I told her, 'Granny, Nehru has become president of Congress!' she was likely to reply: 'That's nice. But does he know who he is?'

It took many years for me to grasp what she was trying to tell me: that most of us are born, go to school, take up jobs, get married, raise children, buy and sell, and pass away without ever knowing who we are.

That is the purpose of meditation: to discover who we are. Only then does our real life begin, and our previous life simply falls away...

We hope this journal will inspire all those who are on the path to Self-discovery.

— Sue Craig and the BMCME Editorial Team



Easwaran, early 1970s.

Our Real Identity

Eknath Easwaran

One of the first lessons I learned in geography was that the earth is round. Our little village in South India had been left out of the march of modern civilization, and most of us hadn't heard this terrible news. Even my teacher was a little diffident in presenting it to us. "You may not believe this," he began, "and if you don't, I sympathize completely. But this is what they gave me to understand when I did my teacher's training in Madras."

When I went home that afternoon, my granny was waiting for me as always by the front gate, ready with her usual greeting: "Well, Little Lamp, what did you learn in school today?"

"Brace yourself, Granny," I said. "You may not believe this, and if you don't, I sympathize completely. But today my teacher told us that the earth is really round." Shattering the illusions of a granny's lifetime.

Not a hair fell out of place. "What does it matter?" she asked. "You can be selfless whether the earth is round or square or triangular."

That took some wind out of my sails. But there was still my mother; she was much easier to surprise. I marched over and said, "Guess what we learned today."

"I can't," she said. "You tell me."

"The earth is round!"

She fell into a paroxysm of laughter which still rings in my ears. She never let me forget that moment, and I don't think she ever believed me either.

I used to try to reason with her. "This isn't just some theory,

Mother,” I’d say. “It has been proved over and over again.” Her point was inarguable: for her, a flat earth worked. “When I go to the temple,” she’d say, “I don’t roll off. When you go to school, you don’t slide down the sides. It looks flat; why should I change my mind?”

Once I saw the practicality of this point of view, I ceased trying to convince her. As long as you keep within a certain sphere of activity, believing that the earth is flat is a harmless superstition that interferes very little with daily living.

A more pervasive kind of ignorance

Virtually all of us, however, are subject to a much more pervasive kind of ignorance that affects every detail of our lives: we believe that we are wholly physical creatures, who can be satisfied in wholly physical ways. This belief has profound practical implications. On the individual level, it means we believe that if we can give a person the capacity to satisfy physical needs and desires, he or she will be happy. Technology will be able to solve our health problems and provide material comfort for everyone. It will also be able to solve our mental problems, since personality and behavior are determined by our chemistry.

Progress is measured in terms of material growth, value in terms of material assets. Even a person’s work is evaluated as a commodity. Finally, there is nothing like a moral order, only the principles of natural selection; so our only rational guide for action is self-interest.

Believing we are the body means we are going to commit a lot of mistakes – likely to do all sorts of absurd things to satisfy emotional or spiritual needs in physical ways that only make us more body-conscious, making the problem worse.

To begin with, identifying with something that is constantly changing is a perfect recipe for insecurity. Everyone wants to keep the body healthy and attractive, but when we start thinking that is who we are, we are fighting a battle with change that no human being has ever won, constantly losing ground in the inevitable decline from those golden years around age eighteen.

Second, as long as we believe we are the body, we can't help believing that everyone else is a body too, each separate from us and from each other. Then it seems natural, even right, to treat our personal interests as separate from theirs, even if getting what we want comes at their expense.

Third, when we identify ourselves with the body, we cannot help believing that we can change ourselves by changing the way we look. So much time and attention goes into playing games with physical appearances! It's like spending our lives fixing up a house we never get around to living in. We design it, build it, plaster it, paint it, furnish it, decorate it and redecorate it over and over, but before we take up residence, we go into the grave.

A hole in consciousness

But the main problem with identifying ourselves with the body is that we spend our lives trying to satisfy nonphysical needs in physical ways. It is as if there is a hole in our consciousness that has no bottom, and day after day we pour into this fathomless pit all the things we think will fill it: bank checks, stock certificates, material possessions, tokens of power and prestige, every fleeting satisfaction of the day. We find a little pleasure or profit and toss it in; we never even hear it hit the bottom, so we try again. This goes on and on and on; we just don't know what else to try.

The discovery of who we are

The great religions of the world have always taught that there is more to the human being than the body: an essential core of personality that is not physical but spirit, divine. Every one of us is born to make the discovery of who we are, where we come from, and what our responsibilities in living are.

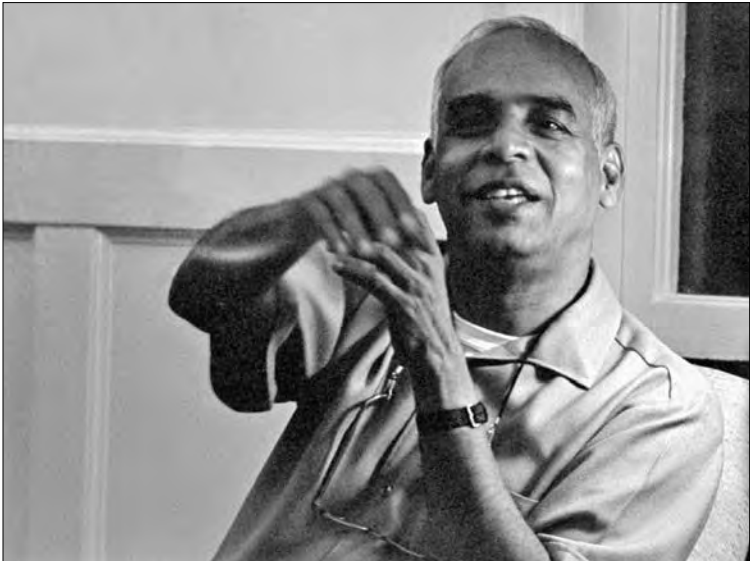
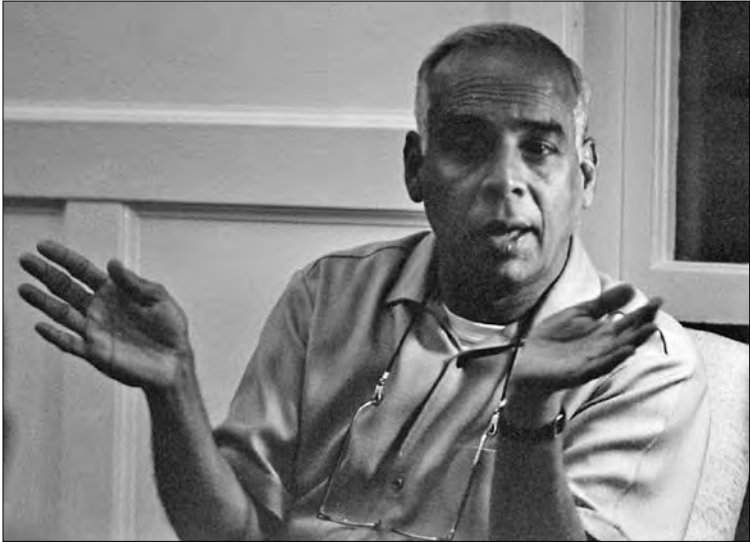
Like everybody else, I grew up believing that I was purely physical, a collection of biochemical constituents. What has changed for me since then? Everything. Not two or three things but everything. Through meditation, with the help of the demanding disciplines I followed every day in the midst of a busy life, that belief in myself as a purely physical creature has fallen away completely. Today I do not look upon myself or anyone else as physical. I identify with the Self, pure spirit, the same in all.

The forces of life

“Like a ball batted back and forth,” says an ancient text called the Yogabindu Upanishad, “a human being is batted by two forces within”: one, the upward drive to evolve into spiritual beings; the other, the fierce downward thrust of our past conditioning as separate, self-oriented, physical creatures.

The literal meaning of the Sanskrit here is “like a ball hit by a stick held in the hand.” I don’t have any idea what game the sages of ancient India had been watching, but I think tennis fits the verse perfectly. Millions of people have taken to this sport in the past few years, so it seems a natural one to use to bring this image to life.

Imagine a match between two gentlemen players from the past who are probably among the best the game has ever seen: Bjorn Borg on the one side and Ivan Lendl on the other.



Easwaran giving class in Berkeley, 1968.

Now imagine being a tennis ball played by these two strong champions—Lendl, whose shots used to travel at more than a hundred miles per hour, and Borg, who would string his racquets so taut that at night he was sometimes awakened by the *ping!* as the strings snapped spontaneously under the strain. Every one of us, this ancient text says, is being played like this twenty-four hours a day back and forth between two opposing inner forces. Here are Ivan on one side of the court and Bjorn on the other, enjoying themselves immensely, yelling to each other, “Hit him for all you’re worth; I’ll slam the poor fellow back!”

This inner tension is our evolutionary heritage. It reflects our divided nature as human beings: partly physical, essentially spiritual, constantly pulled in two conflicting directions. If this sounds bad, it is actually quite positive. For if one of these players will not let us alone, neither will the other.

A persistent upward drive

Built into our very nature is an inner drive that will not let us be satisfied with living at our lowest level, governed only by biological laws. Some inner evolutionary imperative is constantly exhorting us to grow, to reach for the highest that we can conceive, as if nature itself will not let us rest with anything less than spiritual fulfillment.

Toward the end of the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita there is a statement so direct, so penetrating, that it should move us to question all external attempts at self-improvement: those who are always trying to satisfy their personal desires will never find peace in this life. Such people are doomed to live in turmoil and isolation. Why? Because if we cannot make changes where we really want to—in our own personality—it

does not matter what else we may have achieved; we won't be able to live with ourselves.

Often, I think, this is why active people are so active, why adventurers adventure and globetrotters trot: we do not want to stop and listen to that quiet heckler in the depths of our hearts, reminding us of our real job. This is ultimately what insecurity means; that is where a sense of inadequacy really comes from.

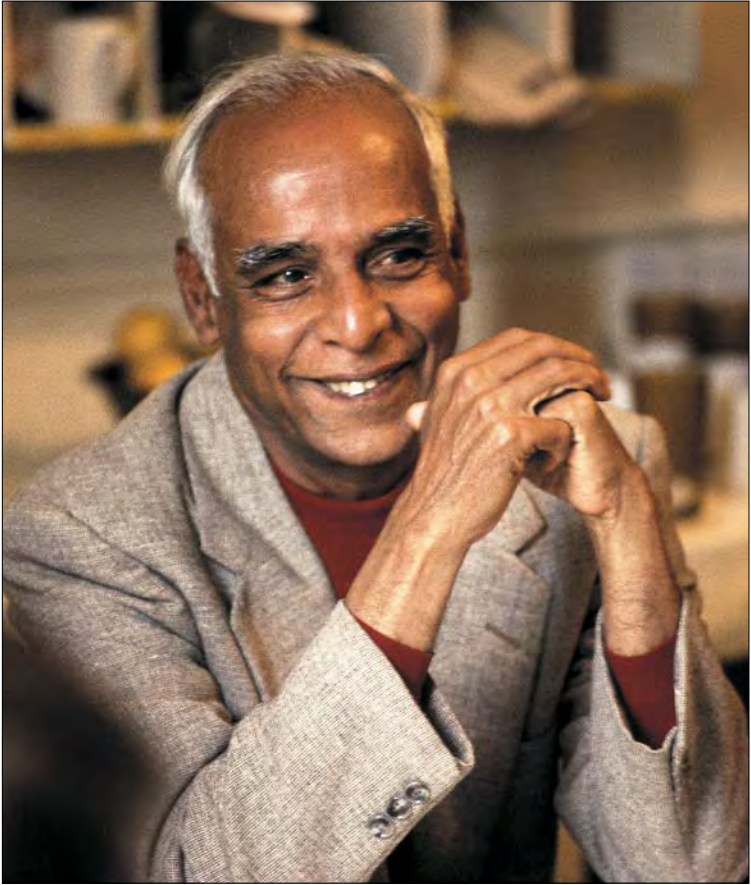
But we can change. No one need ever feel resigned and say, "There is nothing I can do." There is everything we can do. That is the purpose and the power of that persistent upward force within us: if we turn inward we can remake ourselves completely, modeling ourselves in the image of the loftiest spiritual ideal we can conceive.

A deep motive for sense restraint

To a surprising extent, we live to please our body instead of having it help and serve us. Whatever increases physical consciousness cannot be an aid to the spiritual life. Body consciousness is the obstacle to divine awareness, and every day we must ask ourselves what is likely to decrease our identification with the body.

This gives us a deep motive for exercising discriminating restraint over the senses. If we want to discover our real identity, to realize that all life is one and live in harmony with this unity, we must have a body that is healthy and strong, one which will never fail in the selfless service of others.

For example, we should not eat things simply because they look or taste good. Every time we are tempted to eat something because of an advertisement or an old *samskara*, or conditioned habit, we should ask ourselves if the body needs it or if



Easwaran at Ramagiri, 1970s.

it will merely stimulate the palate. When you are hungry, eat what is best for your body. Eating at any other time shows very slight regard for health, and the mind becomes obese and tyrannical when it gets its way like this at the expense of our better judgment.

A toll on the mind

Advertisers, by contrast, seem to want us to think about eating twenty-four hours a day. Under their influence it is very easy to get into the habit of bringing home this little treat and that little tidbit to munch on. Even if you don't have an eating problem, this habit of automatic buying and snacking takes a real toll on the mind. It weakens the will, divides attention, and keeps thoughts turned outward toward the sense-world—just the opposite of what we need to enter the world within.

If you love your children, I would say, don't get them into the “sweets” habit at all—and if you love adults, don't encourage them in it. On a special occasion, I do sometimes treat my teenage friends to a gooey chocolate confection. They can take it. But it's not a special occasion every time we can find a convenient excuse. If every event is celebrated with chocolate or candy, a lot of calories are going to find a home around somebody's waist.

It is not good to dwell on food, either. The gourmet who is constantly looking for new ways to stimulate the palate will become more and more trapped on the physical level. After we have taken reasonable care to see that we get the right food, served with love, we should then forget about it and leave it to the digestive system to do the rest. There is no need to talk about it; there is no need to ask, “When are we going to have another meal like this?”

A reasonable perspective

Once we start retraining our sense of taste, which is in the mind, we can enjoy green salad and fruits as the greatest of delicacies. Skipping a meal, especially when we have eaten a little more than is necessary at the previous meal, is another way of lessening body consciousness.

If I may say so, as spiritual teachers go, I am really very lenient in these matters. The important thing is to remain clear about your goal; then it is easy to keep a reasonable perspective.

Other aids for lessening physical consciousness are giving up harmful habits such as smoking, drinking, the use of drugs, and overindulgence of any kind. This is not for puritanical reasons: if you want to rise above physical consciousness, these are the things you have to throw away. In recalling our desires from the wasteful sensory channels into which they are now flowing, we unify our capacity to desire. Then we can direct this unified love and energy towards the supreme goal.

Once this obsessive physical identification has been broken through, you feel so good all the time that you cannot imagine using any artificial aid to be a few inches high when you are now almost the height of the cosmos.

What it means to be beautiful

Because of body identification, we can also feel that if our appearance is something less than perfect, there is something wrong with *us*.

That beauty is limited to a certain age range—say, eighteen to thirty-nine—is another of the monstrous superstitions of our times. This is not being beautiful; it is being silly.

Some people today get offended if they can't fool people into thinking that they fit this golden category. If they are forty,

they want to look thirty; if their face shows the lines of experience, they may pay thousands of dollars to get the lines erased.

There is a beauty appropriate to every age, and to try to imitate the kind of beauty that belongs to a different age is not only unattractive but foolish. If you are forty and have learned something from experience, you are a much greater asset to life than you were when you were a teenager. Your face should show what you have learned; that is what it means to be beautiful at forty.

Nothing you can put on your skin can be as alluring as a loving heart and an unselfish mind; these are qualities that entrance everyone.

By its very nature, mere physical beauty excites us at first and then soon cloys; it beckons but quickly satiates. Inner beauty—of kindness, of goodness, of patience, of selfless love—may not thrill at the outset; but when you live with someone with these qualities, year after year you will fall more deeply in love.

The inner beauty which shows itself in the capacity to give and to cherish grows with the passage of time. It transcends the senses, transcends even mind and intellect. We can grow in beauty until the last day of our life, and the desire to look on everyone as kith and kin will draw people to us for the beauty of our lives.

Beyond the physical

When you no longer identify others with their bodies, you will be able to see them as people instead. It lifts an immense burden from your close personal relationships. No matter what the media try to tell us, I don't think anything is more certain to disrupt a relationship than treating the other person as a physical object.



Easwaran speaking at a retreat, 1980s.

On the physical level, all of us are separate, and it is the very nature of physical attraction to change with the passage of time. On the other hand, nothing is more certain to deepen a relationship than concern for the other person's real welfare, which we can see clearly only when we cease identifying people with the body-jackets they wear.

When the senses defy us

In spite of our best efforts, however, there will be times in meditation when we find ourselves in a difficult predicament—times when the senses defy us. Even though we are trying our best to lead the spiritual life, the senses are so fiercely turbulent that if we yield to them for a little while, and a little while more, we will be swept away. In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna tells us that even of someone very wise, the senses can become so powerful that they can just pick us up and throw us from the path. This is a warning given to all of us, particularly on the level of sex.

We do not have to belong to the monastic order to lead the spiritual life, and sex has a beautiful place in a completely loving, loyal relationship, though even there with discrimination. But for people who indulge in sex in the wrong context, even though at the outset there may be some satisfaction, ultimately the relationship will be disrupted.

If we ask any two people who have built their relationship on the physical level, they will say that in just a few months they could not bear each other. The tragedy is that after a short time they are again in the same relationship with someone else. If you ask them the same question again, they will say their new relationship also could not last even a few months.

The senses are getting stronger and stronger, resistance is

getting weaker and weaker, and one day such people will find that even if they want to, they will not be able to lead the spiritual life because of the turbulence of the mind.

Sex is sacred; it has beauty and tenderness in the married relationship, where it brings two people closer and closer to become one. But on no account is it going to help us physically, psychologically, or spiritually to indulge this impulse as the mass media are trying to make us do.

The problems of a divided mind

We shall find that we give our best to each other when we put each other first; and when we do not put each other first, sex can breed jealousy. The fiercer our physical conditioning is, the more separate we will feel, and the more we will be prey to all the problems of a divided mind: vacillation, depression, jealousy, and alienation. These problems can be solved, but not on the physical level where they arise. We need access to much deeper levels of consciousness.

Take, for example, a Don Juan who is in a “meaningful relationship” with a young lady named Dulcinea. Juan is a very passionate fellow and intensely jealous. Unfortunately, since Dulcinea is attractive, Juan’s life is an agony of suspicion. The minute she is out of his sight he can’t stop worrying about what she is doing.

According to one school of thought, if Don Juan can exchange his Dulcinea for a Juanita, as loyal as she is lovely, this uncertainty can be dispelled. “Change the environment, change the response” – isn’t it axiomatic? But unfortunately, as most of us know from experience, this simply doesn’t work.

The problem is not with Dulcinea or Juanita or anything else in the outside world; the problem is the uncertainty in the

mind of Don Juan. As long as he is living on the physical level, he cannot help being possessive.

But it is possible for Juan to overcome his jealousy: not by reasoning with it, not by suppressing it, but by learning to be master of his mind. When that is done, all insecurity goes – not only insecurity over Dulcinea, but insecurity over anything. Then he can take Dulcinea out to the Alhambra café, where her former boyfriend plays flamenco, and not be apprehensive at all.

Jealousy comes in only when we try to possess something for ourselves. It is good to admire beauty, but it is neither beautiful nor good if we want to take it home, put it on the mantle, and say, “You just stay there.” When we see something beautiful, we begin to want it for ourselves. It may be a beautiful house, it may be a beautiful flower, it may be a beautiful dancer – we just want it. But by trying to possess it, we lose it.

The secret of all relationships

It is a very difficult secret to understand that when we do not want to possess another selfishly, when we do not make demand after demand, that the relationship is much more likely to last.

Sri Krishna is giving us the secret of all relationships, not only between husband and wife, between boyfriend and girlfriend, but between friend and friend, parents and children. Instead of trying to exact and demand, just give, and give more, and give still more. This is the way to keep love and respect; and it is something we have to learn the hard, hard way.

As we absorb this higher image of who we are, many important consequences follow. When you know that you are essentially spiritual, you no longer relate to yourself as a creature to

be satisfied with physical pleasures. You do not relate to others in terms of their physical appearance. You know that your worth derives from the eternal Self within you – and because this same Self lives in the hearts of all, you find it easy to relate to everyone with respect and love.

A different idea of love

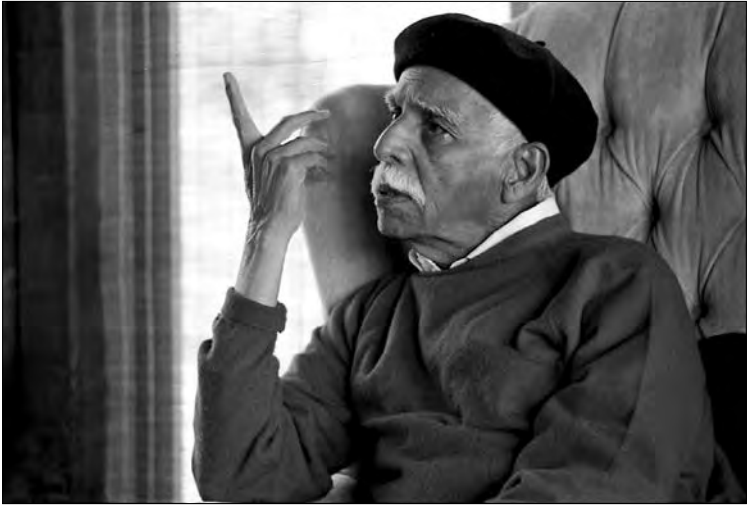
Our real desire in life, as the Bible puts it, is to love the Lord with all our heart, all our mind, all our spirit, and all our strength. The human being's infinite capacity to desire can never be fulfilled by anything less.

Unfortunately, it is equally part of the human condition to believe that we can fulfill our need to love and to be loved by grasping at things and people. When we search outside like this for fulfillment, we misuse our power to love. When we clutch at or cling to anything other than God, we are denying the very possibility of love.

In his *Confessions*, Saint Augustine gives a very different idea of love. This is the same Augustine who in his early life explored the entire gamut of pleasure. He speaks from his own life when he compares spiritual fulfillment to the ordinary pleasures he had enjoyed before:

Not the beauty of any bodily thing, nor the order of the seasons, nor the brightness of light that rejoices the eye, nor the sweet melodies of all songs, nor the sweet fragrance of flowers and ointments and spices: not manna nor honey, not the limbs that carnal love embraces. None of these things do I love in loving my God.

Yet in a sense I do love light and melody and fragrance and food and embrace when I love my God – the light and



Easwaran with students in his study, Ramagiri Ashram, 1980s.

the voice and the fragrance and the food and embrace in the soul, when that light shines upon my soul which no place can contain, and that voice sounds which no time can take from me; when I breathe that fragrance which no wind scatters, and eat the food which is not lessened by eating, and lie in the embrace which satiety never comes to sunder.

This it is that I love when I love my God.

Our ordinary conception of joy is limited to a few bits of sensory pleasure, which we hold on to with a fierce tenacity that enslaves us. But the suspicion that joy comes from within us brings a new sense of freedom. No longer compulsively driven by personal desire—for money or possessions, prestige or pleasure or power—we begin to exercise choices where we never dreamed choices could be made.

A transformation in thought-style

It is from our obsessive identification with the body, I believe, that many physical and emotional problems arise. In meditation, as we learn at deeper and deeper levels that the basis of our personality is not physical but spiritual, such problems fall away.

Often we do not even have to confront them. We simply go deeper, move away from the tenements of consciousness where they arise. A young friend recalling her university days once told me that when she arrived in New York, she lived at first in what she called “rather ratty digs.” She didn’t waste time trying to patch up the place; she simply moved on as soon as she could find somewhere better.

It is the same in meditation. Instead of trying to fix problems one by one, we go to the root: the mind. We gradually move to



Easwaran in his study, 1980s.

a deeper level of consciousness, and when we do, we see that the problems belonging to the previous level have simply been left behind.

This approach is very different from the conventional wisdom of the modern world. It cannot work without meditation. For it is much more than a change in lifestyle; it is a transformation of thought-style. 🌸



In Ramagiri Ashram at a recent event.

The Mirror of Eternity

Place your mind before the mirror of eternity,
place your soul in the brightness of His glory,
place your heart in the image of the divine essence
and transform yourself by contemplation
utterly into the image of His divinity,
that you too may feel what His friends feel as they taste
the hidden sweetness that God himself has set aside
from the beginning for those who love Him.

Casting aside all things in this false and troubled world
that ensnare those who love them blindly,
give all your love to Him who gave Himself in all for
you to love:

Whose beauty the sun and moon admire, and whose
gifts are abundant and precious and grand without end.

— *Saint Clare of Assisi*

Community comment

I discovered the eight-point program near the beginning of my career. The new work was exciting and challenging. Meditation seemed impossible. Sitting each morning and doing battle with my mind for 30 minutes was a struggle. My “Supreme Goal” was about achieving — expertise, and the prestige that went with it. But the work was stressful — maybe meditation would help.



In the previous article, Easwaran writes:

“But the suspicion that joy comes from within us brings a new sense of freedom. No longer compulsively driven by personal desire — for money or possessions, prestige or pleasure or power — we begin to exercise choices where we never dreamed choices could be made.” (page 22)

Over time, I did notice a more joyful way of looking at life, and that my “Supreme Goal” was evolving — from achieving to seeking harmony. And indeed, suspected that this came somehow from within.

It seemed that the practice of meditation itself was what gave me this new view. I decided to meditate twice a day. Challenged myself to take on longer passages. Took the time to prepare myself before meditating. Cultivated the notion that every meditation was just right, as long as I gave my best, no matter the unexpected noises from family or city, or the way the mind stumbled over a missing line.

Trying to deepen my meditation continues to be a wonderful challenge. All of the points help. Stopping to see a friend who is having difficulties after a busy workday, rather than heading home, helps build endurance for when I'm feeling tired during meditation. Listening to kirtan instead of watching TV lights my devotional side, which in turn lights up meditation.

A new favorite mantram practice: mantram litter walks. So much freedom when "Rama" throws "who puts cigarette butts on the ground?" out of my mind! Detachment from the need to judge — well, that just makes everything better. When my energy is low, and the practice feels dry, my satsang gives me strength.

Always, I return to Easwaran's words, grateful for the practical wisdom he gives us all, grateful to be a part of this.

— CB, New Mexico



Shanti meditation hall

Community comment



Sri Easwaran says on page 19:

“Instead of trying to exact and demand, just give and give more, and give still more. This is the way to keep love and respect; and it is something we have to learn the hard, hard way.”

When I first read this many years ago I saw this as an impossible task and concluded Sri Easwaran was mostly a realist but a mere idealist on the odd occasion. But as usual he proved to be right and I was wrong!

We have all been through our fair share of “storms” in life. I have learnt, however, through the grace of Sri Easwaran that the most challenging people in my life have and continue to be my greatest teachers.

Applying spiritual tools, especially meditation and the mantram (particularly mantram writing dedicated to a specific person) in very challenging personal circumstances, I have learnt to give even more in spite of my emotions powerfully pulling me the other way. It is hard to do this in the thick of the moment but in these storms of life, I know that I have felt the grace of the Lord through my teacher.

No one necessarily enjoys storms especially when they are upon us, however, I now know that in that dark and troublesome moment there is a beautiful opportunity to learn more about myself and my fellow humans. I now understand why Gandhi-ji once said “I love storms”; perhaps after each storm we are able to learn a little bit more about who we really are.

- Sandeep, UK

Community comment

I recently returned from a weeklong retreat in Tomales.

On the first day, we were asked to describe the qualities of our real Self “coming down Ashram St.”

I was so inspired by the qualities that we came up with, and every day as I try to bring the retreat back to my daily life, I think of my real Self in those lofty terms — secure, joyful, mindful, patient, loving, and more.

Many of us are discouraged by the news in the greater world. It seems that the problems we face are insurmountable. But I take courage from Easwaran’s words:

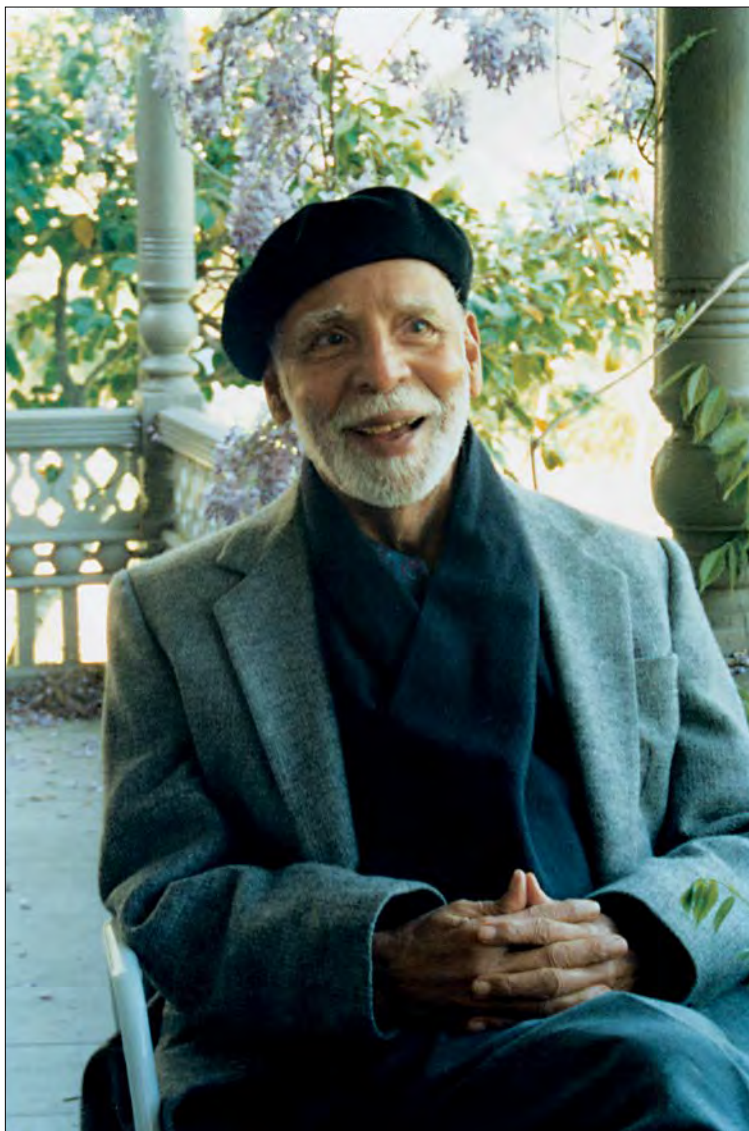
“No one need ever feel resigned and say, ‘There is nothing I can do.’ There is everything we can do. That is the purpose and the power of that persistent upward force within us: if we turn inward we can remake ourselves completely, modeling ourselves in the image of the loftiest spiritual ideal we can conceive.” (page 11)

As Granny says, “What does it matter? You can be selfless whether the earth is round or square or triangular.” Every day I try to remember that the only person I have direct control over is myself, and if I follow the eight points “with sustained enthusiasm” I can’t help but be a positive force in the world.

To that end, I have rededicated myself to slowing down and saying my mantram — which in turn helps me to put others first in my own life, and by extension, to my community and the world.



– Paige, California



In conversation with a longtime student at Ramagiri Ashram, early 1990s.

The Three Stages of Meditation

Eknath Easwaran

If the whole vista of the spiritual journey lay before us we would see that it divides into three stages, each culminating in a remarkable discovery. These are profound experiential discoveries, not intellectual ones. They bring a different way of seeing life and the power to make our words and deeds compatible with this new vision. Mere belief or theory is never enough; we must change ourselves. As one Christian mystic observed, “Our knowledge is as deep as our action.”

Language cannot describe these inner experiences very well. When I say stages, I am only approximating. There are no sharp boundaries; everything takes place gradually over a long period. But perhaps a few analogies will make these discoveries easier to grasp.

Stage 1: We are not the body

In the first stage, we discover experientially that we are not the body. Not the body? A startling realization! We have been lured into believing precisely the opposite: that we are essentially bodies, and that a worthwhile life is one well packed with sense-stimulation and pleasure, with all the delights of food and drink, sun and surf, luxurious fabrics and devastating fragrances.

What is the body then? Let me put it this way. I have a tan jacket of worsted wool made about ten years ago in Hong Kong. It fits me nicely, and I give it proper care: I don't drop it in a heap on a chair; I button it, smooth it out, and hang it up carefully in the closet so it will last several years more.

But when I wear this tan jacket, I always have another jacket on underneath: a brown one made in Kerala, India. It fits even better—not a seam anywhere—and has brown gloves to match. I take good care of it, too.

Now, you wouldn't confuse me with my tan woolen jacket, would you? Well, I have discovered after some years of meditation that this brown Kerala jacket, my body, is not me either, but simply something I wear. In fact, though you can't see me do it, I have learned how to take it off during meditation, leaving consciousness of the body behind. When meditation is over, I put it on again so that I may have the privilege of serving those around me. Someday my tan jacket will wear thin and have to be put aside. And someday too my brown jacket will no longer be useful for service, and I will have to put it aside in the great transformation we call death.

The discovery that you are not the body has far-reaching consequences. For one thing, you no longer see black or brown or white people, but people with all kinds of beautifully colored jackets. You no longer identify people with their color—or their age or sex or hairstyle or any other peripheral matter like money or status. You begin to awaken to the central truth of life, that all of us are one.

Better health, more vitality

Then, too, you develop the capacity to see clearly the body's needs and how to take good care of them.

Wise choices in food, exercise, sleep—all these enhance your health. You feel vital, alive; fatigue leaves without saying good-bye. Minor ills like colds and flu will brush you lightly, if at all. Chronic complaints often dissolve, and you are largely shielded from many serious diseases like hypertension and heart disease.

All this prolongs life and keeps you active, perhaps until the last day of this mortal life. In every tradition, sages often retain their vigor into their eighties and nineties.

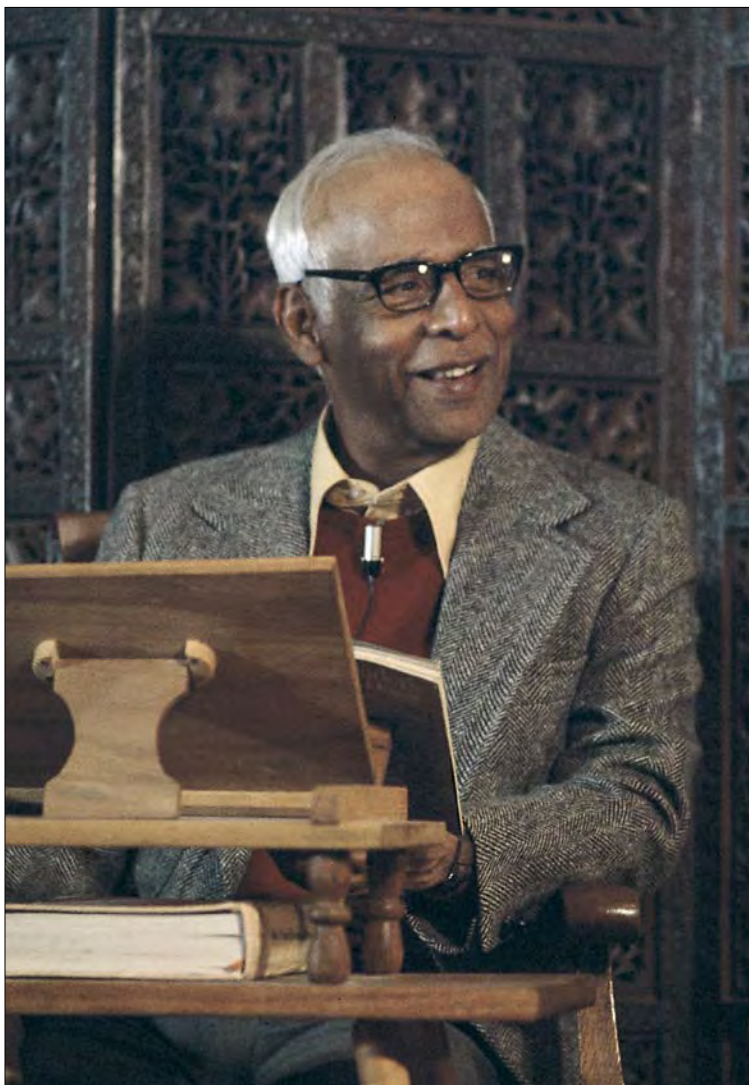
In the first stage of meditation, then, we discover that our bodies are really garments we wear—or, if you like, vehicles in which we ride. All these bodies of ours are just cars moving about—some compacts, some big sedans. Some of them can dash away from a traffic light; others take a while to get going, especially in the morning. And although many were made in America, we have a refreshing mixture of imports too.

Stage 2: We are not our minds

Having come to realize in the first stage of meditation that we are not our bodies, in the second stage we make an even more astounding discovery: we are not our minds either.

Sometimes when I state that, I catch the look on people's faces—a look that seems to say, “Just a minute! First, you tell us that we're not our bodies. Okay. But now you tell us with a straight face that we're not our minds either. My friend, you've just eliminated us completely!” When I see that look I hasten to add, “Wait a bit. There's more to the story.”

If this body is like the body of a car, the mind is the engine—the most important part of the vehicle. As such, we ought to give it special attention and care. After all, you can get along with a Model T body if you have a Ferrari engine. But so many people who want a Ferrari body are content to keep an old Model T engine putt-putting along inside it. Most of their attention goes to externals: chrome hubcaps, bordeaux cherry vinyl seats, geodesic paint jobs, velveteen steering wheel covers, little dolls that shake their hula skirts in the back window. What is the good of all that if the pistons are worn out and your



Easwaran giving class in the Shanti meditation hall, 1970s.

engine won't perform? We need minds that are powerful, lucid, capable of discrimination.

“Why won't my mind do what I say?”

And we need minds that will follow directions, not ones that are rebellious. Suppose I come out one morning, start up my car, and drive off to give a talk on meditation in Milpitas, south of San Francisco. As soon as I cross the Golden Gate Bridge, my car veers east towards Interstate 80. I keep trying to turn the wheel, but there is tremendous resistance—the steering mechanism is ignoring me. “Milpitas!” I protest. “We're supposed to be going to Milpitas!” But the car only roars insolently, “Reno! Reno! We're going to Reno!” Then I think I hear it snicker, “Why not sit back and enjoy the ride?”

Would we put up with that? Well, no ... not from our cars. But most of us do from our minds. In theory we would like the mind to listen to us obediently, but in fact it will not—chiefly because we have never taught it how. Augustine's words speak plainly: “I can tell my hand what to do and it will do it instantly. Why won't my mind do what I say?”

Everywhere there are a few people who will not accept this condition, who see it as a loss of freedom, a kind of bondage. My grandmother, my spiritual teacher, knew nothing about cars, but she understood the mind. When I would give tit-for-tat to others, wax angry because they were angry or standoffish because they stood off, she would say, “Son, when you act that way, you remind me of a rubber ball. Throw it against a wall and it has to come back.” It took a while, but I finally resolved not to be a rubber ball in life.

Mastering the art of living

I have often said that the spiritual life has nothing to do with the paranormal and the occult. But I do have one ability that seems to some people a kind of miracle, though it is simply a skill that anyone can develop through years of meditation: I can tell my mind what to do.

Where is the miracle? As Shakespeare's Hotspur would say, "Why, so can I, or so can any man." Well, here it is: when I tell my mind what to do, it obeys. If a craving should arise for something my body does not need, I smile and say politely, "Please leave," and it leaves. If something big tries to move in—say, an angry thought—I don't bandy words; I say plainly, "Out!" It goes immediately.

Meditation will do for you what it has done for all who practice it regularly: enable you to steer your car expertly. If you want to stay in one lane and cruise, your mind will obey you. If you want to change lanes or turn right or left or even make a U-turn, your mind will respond. When your mind does that at command, you have mastered the art of living. You are no longer dependent on external circumstances; you can decide how you want to respond, whatever happens. If a friend acts thoughtlessly, for example, you don't have to dwell on it; you can fix your attention on the good in that person instead.

Changing our minds

If you begin to feel low, you simply change your mind—you have learned how—and restore your equanimity and cheerfulness. You can now think what you want to think, and every relationship, everything you do, benefits enormously.

When you know you are not the body, you find it inaccurate to say, "I'm not feeling well." Your body may be indisposed, but

you are always well.

Now, in the second stage of meditation, you discover it equally inaccurate to say, “I am angry.” The mind is angry. Instead of being consumed by anger, you can have a little fun at your own expense: “Hmm! There seems to be a nut loose up in there.” A mechanical problem—anger—has developed, and if you know how to lie down on your mental car creeper, scoot under your mind, and tighten things up—or, more likely, loosen them a little—the problem can be set right. And you don’t have to pay out hundreds of dollars before you get your car keys back.

This perspective brings precious distance—detachment—from the problems of both body and mind. For one, negative emotions no longer threaten. I mentioned anger, but fear comes under control as well. You can tune the engine of your mind very much the way you choose—in fact, you can come to have such mastery that even in your sleep, negative thoughts like resentment, hostility, and greed will not arise. You take full responsibility for your mental states as well as for your behavior.

Power in our hands

A well-tuned mind helps to conserve the vital energy wasted in negative emotions. No one would leave a car running in the garage all night, but we let our minds run on much of the time. No wonder we often feel tired and dispirited! This loss of vitality can even lead to illness.

Family and general practice physicians report that between seventy and eighty percent of their patients come in with psychologically generated complaints, vague feelings of “dis-ease.”

The Buddha had an incisive term for this: *duhkha*, which implies “out of joint.” When vitality has been wasted we simply do not function well, like an elbow that has slipped out of place. When we know how to set right any turmoil in the mind, all the power comes into our hands, to be used for the benefit of all. I cannot imagine a time when this was more essential. Every one of us has so much to give—more than we can realize—and it is so badly needed. Can we afford to waste it?

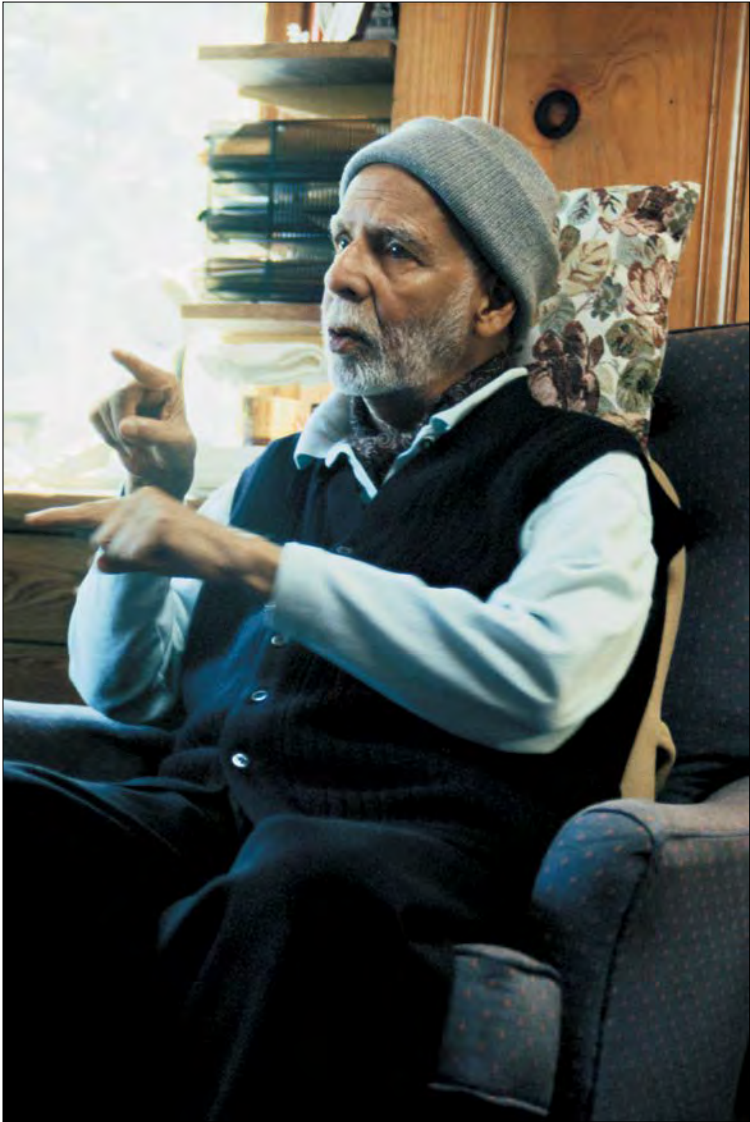
Stage 3: The great discovery

Having discovered that we are not the body, not the mind—both subject to change, to growth and decline—the question remains, “Who am I?” In the third stage, the tremendous climax of meditation, we make the most significant discovery any human being can ever make: we find out who we really are. As long as we identify with the body and the mind we bob around on the surface level of consciousness, chasing after the fleeting attractions of life outside us. Here a pleasure won, there one lost. A bit of praise today, some criticism tomorrow. Profit, loss, profit, loss. Thus our days are spent, and we are scattered, divided, restless, incomplete.

Now, in profound meditation, we drop below all that and become concentrated on one thing and one thing alone: our true identity. In this absorption, this great gathering within, we break through the surface of consciousness and plummet deep, deep into our real nature.

A transcendental mode of knowing

What we discover cannot be put into words, but thereafter we are never again the same. With all our consciousness gathered to an intense focus within, the boundaries that seem to



Easwaran talking with close students in the office at Ramagiri, 1990s.

separate us from the rest of the world disappear. The duality of subject and object, knower and known, falls away; we are opened to a transcendental mode of knowing. Albert Einstein must have glimpsed this when he wrote from the perspective of a great physicist:

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us ‘Universe,’ a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us.

Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

In this profound state all petty personal longings, all hungering and thirsting, all sense of incompleteness vanish. We discover, almost in every cell of our being, that deep within us we lack nothing. Our inner reserves of love and wisdom are infinite; we can draw on them endlessly and never diminish them.

One grand harmony

Previously, vague tones of discordancy sounded through what we thought and did. Like a shoe that pinches, a dislocated shoulder, the wrong key in a lock, matters were somehow just not right. But now a sense of rightness pervades our life; we fit, we belong.

This earth, nature, our fellow creatures, we ourselves—all things take their proper places in one grand harmony. Because

we identify not with a fragment of life but with the whole, conflicts and division cease.

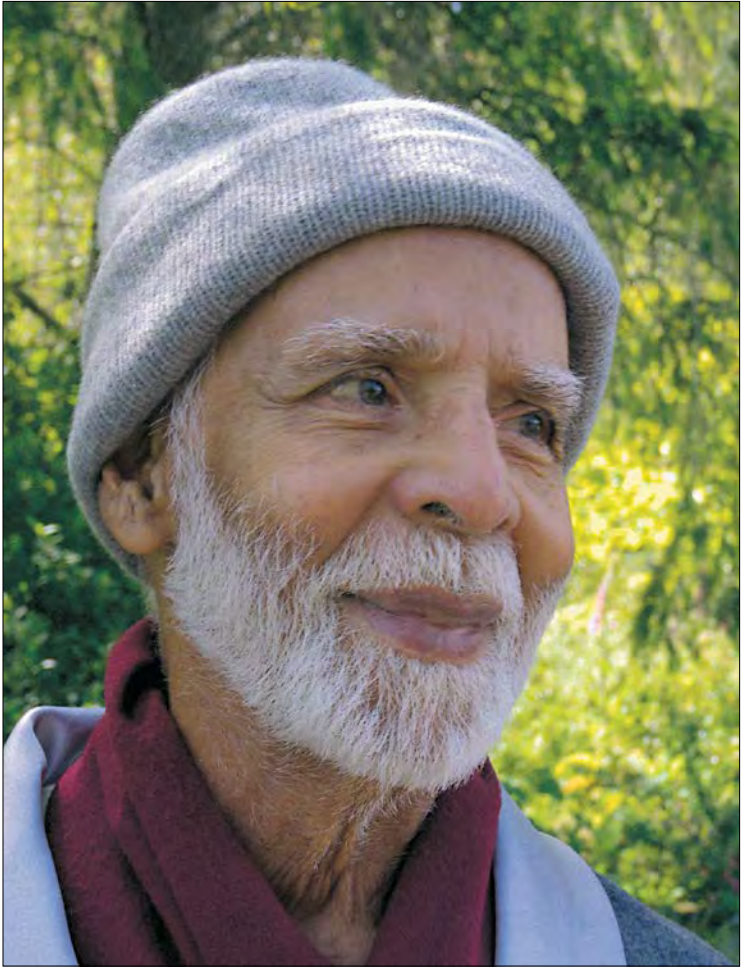
Of course, problems in the world remain—perhaps only now do we see just how threatening they really are. But we see too that they can be solved, and that we have the wisdom and resourcefulness with which to solve them. Those difficult stretches that test our mastery—sudden rises, hairpin turns, icy roads—we negotiate skillfully, like a practiced driver. And since we are fit to meet such challenges, they come—even big ones. But we stand ready: there will be difficult steering ahead, but we can manage it without fatigue or burnout.

Life itself becomes an effortless performance—very much like the virtuosity of a renowned pianist or cellist. The artist makes it look so easy; we almost want to exclaim, “Why, I could play that way!” But what enormous practice goes into such mastery! Once, it is said, a great painter took a mediocre portrait and brought it to vibrant life with a few quick strokes. His students were awed.

“How did you manage to achieve that?” one asked. “It took just five minutes at most.” The master said, “Oh, yes, it took only five minutes to do it. But it took twenty-five years to learn how to do it.”

All life is our family

This skill in living brings beauty to your relationships. Only the sense of separateness makes us quarrelsome or difficult with others, and now no one can ever be separate from you again. Imagine that the little finger on your left hand turns feisty. It looks over at the thumb, which is minding its own business, and says, “What’s that odd bird doing here? I’m going to tell him to clear out. If he doesn’t, he’s in for a drubbing!” What



Easwaran at Ramagiri Ashram, 1990s.

could be more absurd? Doesn't an injury to the thumb hurt the whole hand, of which the little finger is a member?

When you discover your real nature, you discover simultaneously that you and others are one. In harming them, you are actually harming yourself; in being kind to them, you are being kind to yourself. All life is your family now, and though you express it in different ways with different people, you feel towards each person – to use the words of the Buddha – as a mother does towards her only child.

This does not mean that differences of opinion all vanish. There is diversity on the surface of life; that is what gives it interest. But now you always have the ability to understand other points of view. Aren't people essentially the same everywhere? The differences account for only one percent; the similarities, for ninety-nine. You can jump right out of your shoes or sandals into another's and see things as they do; you can leap right across supposed barriers of age, sex, economic status, nationality. You live in everybody, just as everybody lives in you.

Our highest goal

Attaining this state of consciousness is the highest goal we can have in life. Different religions have called it by different names: illumination, enlightenment, nirvana, Self-realization, entering the promised land or the kingdom of heaven within. But whatever the language, the experience is everywhere the same. Jesus called it “a pearl of great price.” Without it, our lives will always be wanting; even if we had to give everything on earth to obtain it, the cost would not be too high to pay.

I haven't tried to conceal the fact that learning to control your mind is difficult – the most difficult thing in the world.

But I want to remind you always that what you are seeking is glorious beyond compare, something far beyond my capacity, or anybody's, to render into thoughts and words. In my heart I have no greater desire than that you should reach the goal. Accept my wish for your great success! 🌸

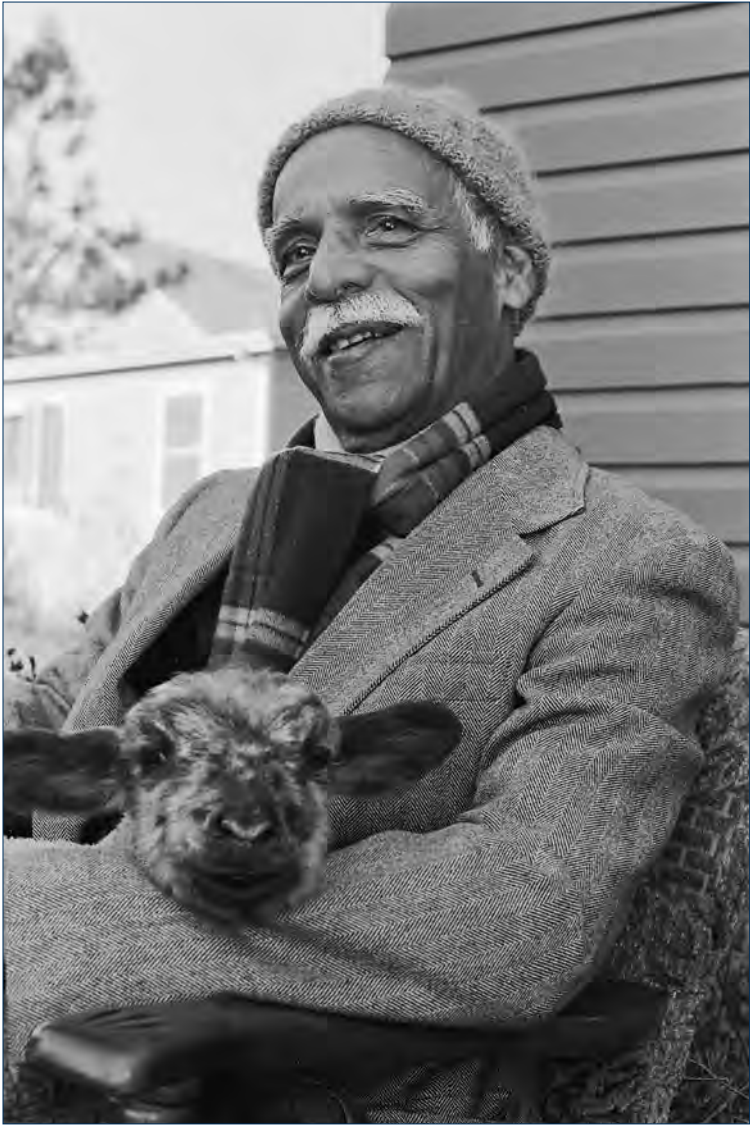
All Paths Lead to Me

Those who know me as their own divine Self,
As the Operator in them, break through
The belief that they are the body, and are
Not born separate again. Such a one
Is united with me, O Arjuna.

Delivered from selfish attachment, fear,
And anger, filled with Me, surrendering
Themselves to me, purified in the fire
Of my Being, many have reached the
State of Unity in me.

As people approach me, so I receive
Them. All paths lead to me, O Arjuna.

*from the Bhagavad Gita,
translated by Easwaran*



Easwaran at Ramagiri Ashram, 1980s.

A Higher Image through the Eight-Point Program

Eknath Easwaran

Spiritual growth is a lifelong dialogue between our everyday personality and our innermost Self, between the daily and the divine in the depths of the heart, when the superficial self we are aware of speaks to the deeper wisdom in us all.

Meditation on a Passage

In meditation, when you go through an inspirational passage such as the Prayer of Saint Francis with complete attention, each significant word or phrase drops like a jewel into the depths of consciousness. If you take these passages deep, deep into consciousness, into that depth where the words open up their inner meaning and take you in, these words have power to change your life. With each sentence you are absorbing the loftiest image of human nature.

When your absorption in the passage is complete, nothing else will remain in your consciousness. Saint Francis's ideals will gradually displace all negative thoughts, so that little by little, divinity begins to shine through. Your mind is empty of yourself, true; but that is also to say it is full of God.

Repetition of a Mantram

Meditation on an inspirational passage for half an hour every morning slows down the thinking process. Then during the day, the mantram keeps the mind from speeding up again.

The mantram, in some traditions called a prayer word, is the living symbol of the profoundest ideal that the human being

can conceive of, the highest that we can respond to and love. When we repeat the mantram in our mind, we are reminding ourselves of the Supreme Reality enshrined in our hearts. The more we repeat the mantram, the deeper it sinks into our consciousness.

Slowing Down

Meher Baba, a well-known saint of modern India, used to say that a mind that is fast is sick, a mind that is slow is sound, and a mind that is still is divine. This is what the Bible means when it says, “Be still and know that I am God.”

The more we slow down the thinking process, the more control we have over our lives. That is why Meher Baba says a mind that is slow is sound. When your mind stops racing, it is naturally concentrated rather than distracted, naturally kind instead of rude, naturally loving instead of selfish.

When the mind is stilled, no fragmentary thoughts can grow: no selfish urges, no resentments, no hostilities. All those who have become established in this state say that this is infinite joy and infinite love, for which all of us are born.

One-Pointed Attention

Our attention is a most precious faculty. It matters greatly what we do with it, because whatever we place our attention on, be it good or ill, is encouraged to flourish. Achieving this precious skill of one-pointedness will also greatly facilitate meditation and speed our progress on the spiritual path. Meditation is concentration, and concentration becomes, finally, consecration.

As our absorption grows, we shall come to see that possessions, evanescent pleasures, fame, and all the power in the

world can never satisfy us, but only that which is full of love and wisdom, that which does not pass. When we let our minds become scattered, we are but leaves on the surface of the lake of life, far from the infinite reality. When we unify our minds, we plunge deeper and deeper into that reality and move ever closer to the Lord.

Training the Senses

When we stimulate the senses unduly, vitality flows out through them like water from a leaky pail, leaving us drained physically, emotionally, and spiritually. But when we train the senses we conserve our vital energy, the very stuff of life. Patient and secure within, we do not have to look to externals for satisfaction.

Training the senses means training the mind as well. Where there are many strong desires, the mind is in constant turmoil. Huge waves lash and roil the surface, and we cannot see the bottom of the lake of the mind: our true Self.

When we learn to train our senses and master our desires, fewer and fewer of these waves rise up. Gradually the mind becomes still, so that we can discover our real identity.

Putting Others First

Dwelling on ourselves builds a wall between ourselves and others. Those who keep thinking about their needs, their plans, their ideas cannot help becoming lonely and insecure. The simple but effective technique I recommend is to learn to put other people first, beginning within the circle of your family and friends. When husband and wife try to put each other first, for example, they are not only moving closer to each other. They are also removing the barriers of their ego-prison, which

deepens their relationships with everyone else as well.

All spiritual progress requires the sacrifice of self-will, not so much in one grand gesture as in many little acts of thoughtfulness during the day. Eradicating self-will is the means by which we realize the supreme goal of the spiritual life.

Spiritual Fellowship

According to an ancient Sanskrit saying, what is good in us and what is bad, our strong points and our weak points alike, develop because of constant association. When we associate with calm people, we become calm; when we associate with agitated people, we become agitated. When we frequent the company of people who are wise, we become wiser; when our company is otherwise, we become otherwise too.

It should be no surprise, then, that an essential part of the spiritual life is joining together with those who are spiritually minded, those who want to promote our growth and who want us to promote theirs.

Spiritual Reading

We are so surrounded today by a low concept of what the human being is that it is essential to give ourselves a higher image. For this reason I recommend devoting half an hour or so each day to reading the scriptures and the writings of the great mystics of all religions.

Just before bedtime, after evening meditation, is a particularly good time, because the thoughts you fall asleep in will be with you throughout the night.

Every great work of mystical literature becomes a living channel between you and the saint or scripture from which it comes. 🌸

BMCM retreats 2018





The Goal of Evolution

Eknath Easwaran

Modern civilization believes that the purpose of the body is to enjoy pleasure. Hindu and Buddhist mystics put it very differently: because of our desires for pleasure and profit we take on a body over and over again, life after life, through millions of years of evolution. Against the vast backdrop of reincarnation there is no hit and miss in this; it is all precisely governed by the law of karma.

As long as personal desires continue, the body will continue; and as long as the body continues, death will continue. When we cease to think of ourselves as separate creatures with separate, personal needs, we break through identification with the body and conquer death – not in some other world, some after-life, but here and now. Yama, the King of Death in the Katha Upanishad, tells his young student Nachiketa,

When all desires that surge in the heart
Are renounced, the mortal becomes immortal.
When all the knots that strangle the heart
Are loosened, the mortal becomes immortal.
This sums up the teachings of the scriptures.

This is the purpose of life, the culmination of the long journey of evolution. On the physical level, the human body at one end of this journey and a bacterium at the other differ only in degree. If you put a little sugar in their environment, I once read, bacteria will move toward it; put in something they do not like and they will move away. I thought to myself, “How human!” That is the nature of life on the physical level, and there is not much freedom in it.

Only the human being has the capacity to defy the conditioning of pleasure and choose not to identify with the body but with the changeless, eternal Self.

In this sense, only a few of us – men and women like Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, Thérèse of Lisieux, Sri Ramakrishna – can accurately claim the title of *Homo sapiens*. The rest of us, though dressed for the part, have not yet come into the glory of our inheritance.

As long as we identify with the body we are fragments, occupying a limited portion of space and perhaps eighty years in time. But there is a much vaster “I,” the Self, compared with which this tiny ego-corner is no more nor less than a prison. Our whole modern way of life is based on the belief that we can enjoy ourselves in this prison, find fulfillment in this prison, leave our mark on posterity in this prison, all because we have leave to walk about for a while in the prison yard and perhaps play a little volleyball. If we could only see how narrow this life is, how petty, how quickly ended, we would concentrate all our effort on escaping from it once and for all.

The perfection of personality

During the second part of life we learn to defy all the selfish desires that human existence is prey to, hundreds of them, through the practice of meditation and the allied disciplines. This is not negating desires; it is unifying them – transforming them from selfish to selfless, from individual to universal.

This unification of desires leads to the integration of personality in its full glory. Instead of living just for one person, we live for the welfare of all, for the happiness of all. The partitions of the ego are down. We live in all creatures, which means we live a thousandfold more. Everything is magnified:

our sympathy, our sensitivity, our strength, our love, our capacity to give and help and serve. This is not the extinction of personality; it is its perfection.

This does not mean that the body is lost. The body remains, but we no longer identify ourselves with it. The tremendous motivation to contribute to the welfare of the whole world releases vitality for a long, vigorous, victorious life, in which all our deepest desires are fulfilled.

The usual idea is that this is a dull, drab, desireless existence. Just the opposite. It is the person who has mastered desires who really enjoys the innocent pleasures of life. To give a small example, I eat excellent, nutritious food, go to concerts, take every opportunity to see a good play or a tasteful film. When I go to the beach for a long, fast walk, usually taking a few friends and dogs along for company, my mind and body enjoy the exercise and the soothing music of the surf the way a child enjoys ice cream. All these are part of my *sadhana* (spiritual disciplines), for they enable my body and mind to function smoothly for many years of hard, sustained, selfless work.

Loving labor

Here the spiritual figures of other times can give us confidence by their example. Ask Saint Augustine if his behavior as a young man gave any hint of the treasures of the spirit hidden inside. He would laugh. “Ask my parents,” he would say. “Ask around my home town. They will tell you what a sigh of relief they breathed when I left for Carthage, burning with my desires. ‘You weren’t the same person then,’ they say—and in a sense that is true. That young man was a pauper, insolvent, worth nothing much, a burden on most everybody. In his place today there stands a prince, bearing gifts for all.”



Easwaran on Dillon Beach, 1970s.

And if we ask, “Is this a miracle, then?” Augustine would just smile. “Not at all. It is the result of a tremendous amount of loving labor. I had to teach my mind new ways of thinking. But the hardships are not overwhelming if you want more than anything else to bring your destiny into your own hands.”



Young helpers at a recent family retreat.

When all desires are right desires, says the *Theologica Germanica*, “all things are lawful, save one tree and the fruits thereof ... that is, self-will.” Saint Augustine puts it even more simply: “Love; then do as you will.” This word *love* is used so commonly today that we have all but forgotten what it means. Because of our physical orientation, we think in terms of one-to-one relationships over candlelight and wine, “dancing cheek to cheek,” or sitting together under a swaying palm tree admiring a Caribbean moon. All this is just the shadow of love. We are not made to love only one or two individuals. We have the immense capacity to be in love with everyone, with every creature.

It is not that we love our partner or children any less. We love them much more, but now we feel equal love for all.

There is nothing sentimental about this. It is thoroughly practical. Every child becomes your child, each creature part of your family; you take care of the planet just as you would your home. Which of us would eat up all the food in the house, burn the back porch for firewood, dump garbage in the bathtub, spray the rooms with noxious chemicals, and then tell our children, “Whatever is left is yours”? Similarly, those who are in love with creation lead a simple, self-reliant life as trustees of the world’s resources, returning to life much more than they take away.

A lasting beneficial force

Such a person has really ceased to be an individual. He or she is a lasting beneficial force, whose power to improve the lives of others is in no way diminished when the physical body is shed at the time of death. Saint Francis, to take just one example, cannot be described in the terms of a police report: five foot

four, one hundred and twenty pounds, living for forty-three years. That is the container; Francis is a force, affecting our lives today exactly as it did when it was embodied in Assisi.

Or look at a figure much closer to us in time, whom I have seen and heard and walked with, Mahatma Gandhi. Even though he laid down his life more than half a century ago, the force of nonviolence Gandhi embodied is still at work among us, inspiring us and reassuring us that we do have the capacity to meet the worldwide threat of destruction – not by the love of power, as nations try to do, but by the power of love. The first is the power to destroy; power that is invincible is the power to support and serve.

Of all that is wonderful in the human being, our most glorious asset is this capacity to change ourselves. Nothing is more significant. I admire the achievements of science, but I do not feel intimidated by the current conviction that we are what our genes are. My body is what my genes make it, but my character and behavior are not fixed by my genetic code.

Your real nature is spirit

As proof we have the lives of great men and women of all religions who have thrown these claims to the winds with their personal transformations – from angry to compassionate, from insecure to unshakable, from human to divine. The message of their lives echoes down the corridors of time to those who have ears to hear: “You are not what your body is. Your real nature is spirit, which nothing can diminish or deny.” Whatever our past, whatever our present, all of us have the capacity to change ourselves completely through the practice of meditation.

When I was enabled, after years of meditation, to discover

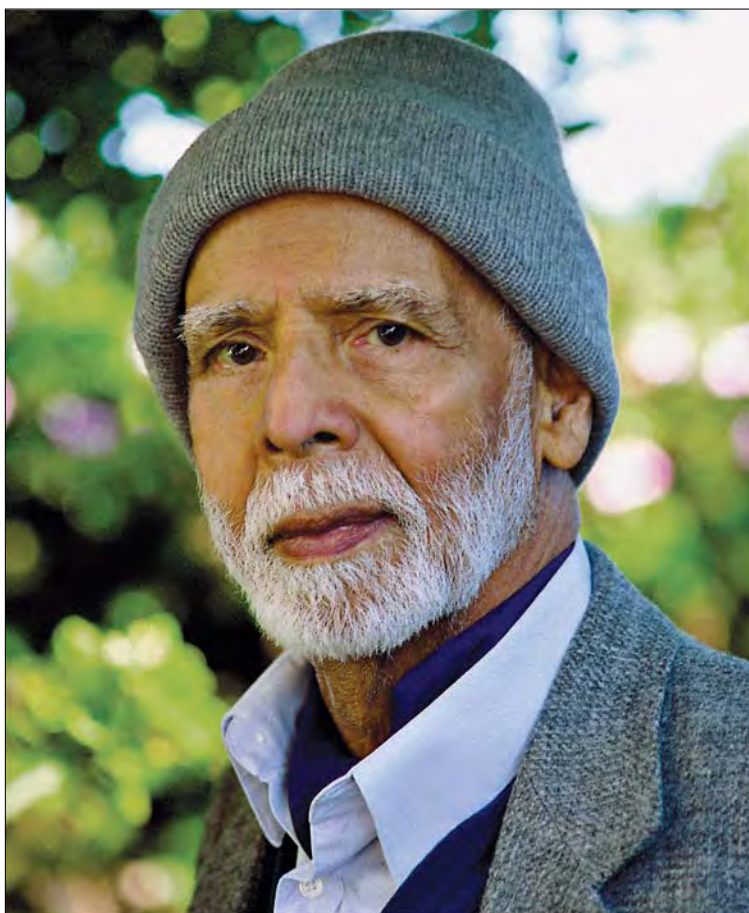
who I am, the joy of that discovery knew no bounds. And my love knew – and knows – no bounds.

Today I know I am not just a separate fragment of existence subject to old age and death. I live in everyone. I am related to everything around me – the seas, the skies, the mountains, the rivers, the forests, the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. I am an immortal being with a million interconnections with all of life.

This is our greatness, to be connected with everything on earth. And when we discover this, the Buddha says, we go beyond all sorrow. 🌸



A recent family retreat at Ramagiri Ashram.



Easwaran, 1990s.

Going Home

This world around us that seems so real, the mystics tell us, is not our real home. Outside the old city of Delhi is an ancient bridge with a haunting inscription from Persian poetry: “This is a bridge, this a bridge, don’t build your home on it.”

That is all this life is, just a bridge. We are passersby, wayfarers traveling from eternity to eternity. Eternity is our home. We come from the Lord and we are destined to return to him.

It can tear our heartstrings to realize that by pursuing things like money and material possessions, pleasure and profit, we are trying to build our home on a foundation that time is going to sweep away.

Today on campus little Julia was staffing our table. I asked her respectfully, “Do you meditate?” (She is four years old.) “Yes,” she said. I asked, “How do you do it?” She thought for a while and then replied, “I go home.”

That is exactly what meditation means: going home to the realm of infinite joy, infinite love, and infinite peace that we call God.

In every sensitive human being, there comes a time when we cannot help feeling homesick. As the great mystics of all religions tell us, we are simply beginning to remember who we are. All this time we have spent sojourning on this earth, buying and selling, getting and spending, is like a dream. Now we are beginning to wake up, and consciousness is flooded with old, old memories that inflame our longing for our real home. And once this longing comes up, it begins to consume all other desires. For as the Upanishads say in glorious words, “There is no joy in the finite. There is joy only in the Infinite.”



Meditation Retreats

Make 2019 the year to visit the BMCM and join a retreat! We're always happy to meet new friends and welcome back returnees — and there's a program for everyone. Our peaceful retreat house is the perfect place to get started in passage meditation and to deepen your practice. We offer a sliding scale for fees and offer generous scholarships to help you attend.

Introductory Weekend Retreats:

2018: October 5–7

2019: January 18–20, March 29–31, June 7–9, October 4–6

Young Adult Weekend Retreats: (20s & 30s)

2018: November 2–4

2019: March 15–17, November 1–3

Returnee Weekend Retreats:

2019: February 1–3, April 26–28, August 16–18,
November 8–10

Weeklong Retreats:

2019: April 6–12, May 4–10, July 6–12 (Affiliates & Cohorts),
August 3–9, October 12–18

Family Weekend:

2019: July 27–28

Senior Retreats:

2019: March 8–12, May 31 – June 4, September 13–17

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Online programs

If you'd like to connect from home, join us for an online program. We strive to live out Easwaran's teachings with a slowed-down and one-pointed atmosphere.

Introductory Webinars:

2019: January 26, May 18, September 21

Returnee Online Workshops:

2018: November 10

2019: February 23, August 24, November 16

Living Out the Eight Points with Children — Webinars:

2019: March 24, May 19, December 8

Learn Passage Meditation — Online Courses: (six weeks)

2018: September 14 – October 26

2019: February 1 – March 15, October 25 – December 6





Those who depart from this world
without knowing who they are
or what they truly desire
have no freedom here or hereafter.

But those who leave here
knowing who they are
and what they truly desire
have freedom everywhere,
both in this world and in the next.

*- from the Chandogya Upanishad,
translated by Easwaran*



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