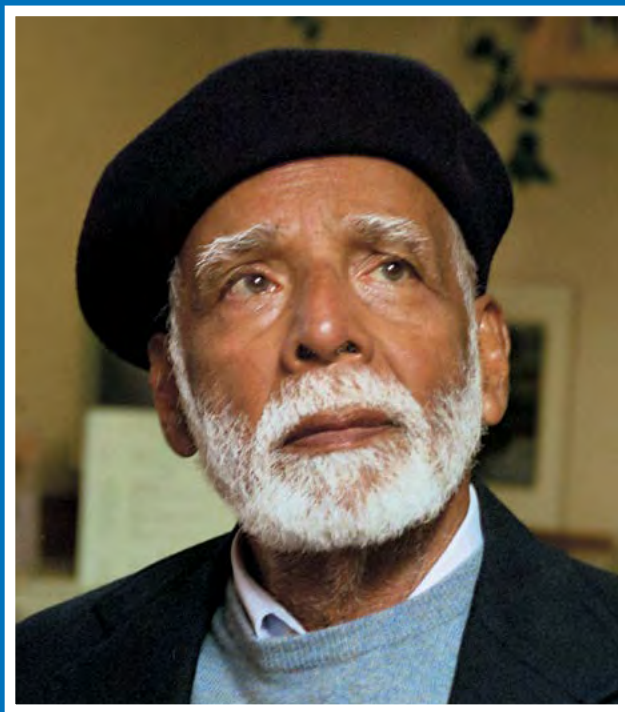


Ekknath Easwaran on Meditation & Spiritual Living

# Blue Mountain Journal

WINTER / SPRING 2020



## A World on Fire

PART 1:

## It starts in the mind

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## What the World Needs Now

Eknath Easwaran

Like thoughtful people everywhere, I am deeply troubled by the direction in which the world is moving. I don't think any changes in politics or economics are going to set right this almost compulsive drifting away from all that is noble in human nature.

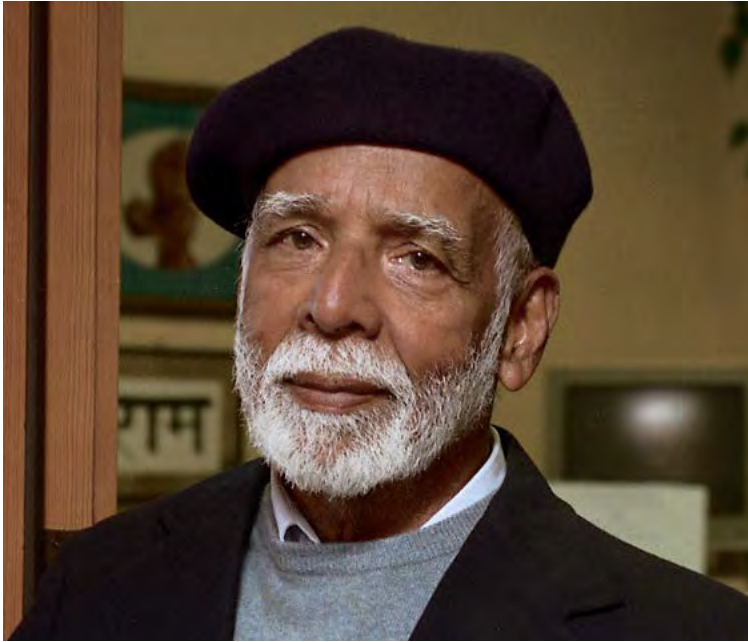
The twentieth century has made great advances in science and technology, but it has also to be admitted that this same science and technology has been misused in terrible wars and supports an undeclared war that the industrial world is waging against the environment today.

I am aware of what the industrial revolution has done for us, what comforts it has brought, what conveniences it has given. But the bills are coming in.

Just as there was a cultural renaissance in the West several centuries ago, the world needs a spiritual renaissance today. Just as there was an industrial revolution two hundred years ago, the world needs a spiritual revolution here and now.

And the wonderful feature of a spiritual revolution is that it cannot be accomplished by governments or corporations. It can be brought about only by little people like us: every man, every woman, every child, changing their personality from selfish to selfless, from human to divine.

For this we need, first and foremost, a higher image of the human being. So far the human being has essentially been looked upon as a separate, physical creature that enters life through one door at birth and disappears through another at death. Every mystic in every great religion, on the basis of



Easwaran, 1990s.

spiritual experience, has rightly called this an utterly superficial and distorted view.

So the first step in a spiritual revolution is for parents and teachers to practice spiritual disciplines that replace this low image with a lofty one.

This is where our method of meditation excels, for the passages we meditate on exalt the human being to the stars. What we meditate on, we become. What parents and teachers practice, children will absorb.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Easwaran". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends across the width of the text.

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## In This Issue

This issue is the first in a new four-part series of the *Blue Mountain Journal* titled “A World on Fire,” in which Easwaran will address the global crises facing us. In this time of mounting despair and confusion he will offer us practical spiritual guidance and a realistic sense of hope.

With last year’s wildfires fresh in Californian memory and the Australian bush still burning as we write, the environmental crisis is Easwaran’s focus in this issue. Love for the environment was one of his main teaching messages throughout his life, increasing in urgency as he saw the situation deteriorate.

His starting point in healing the environment is the mind. “Without some control over the thinking process,” Easwaran writes, “it is impossible to make lasting changes in the way we live.” The mind is the place where our environmental problems begin, he points out, and it is the place where the battle for Mother Earth must be fought. But though the outlook seems bleak, it is also full of promise. Through systematic training of the mind we can harness our desires and start to build a better world.

—the BMCM Editorial Team

Winter/Spring 2020, Volume 31, No. 1

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The *Blue Mountain Journal* is a publication of The Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, a California 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1961 by Eknath Easwaran to carry on his work.

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# The Fight for the Future of the Earth

Eknath Easwaran

Our modern industrial civilization is in an involuntary conspiracy to convince us that by loving things we will become happy. Yet, from a spiritual perspective, it is clear that the love affair with material objects presented so beguilingly by advertisers is causing acute misery.

People are to be loved. Creatures and the living earth are to be loved. Things are to be used wisely. The tragic inversion of values that draws us to love things and use people has led to our current environmental crisis, in which the natural inheritance of our children's children is being squandered and destroyed within a single generation.

The sheer vastness of the problems we face is daunting, and it is only natural to feel terrible grief when we read about millions of acres of forests being burned, or several species becoming extinct every day, or the atmosphere being dangerously altered. Yet few people realize what a valuable resource for change this grief is. To be able to transform your anger or grief into a force for positive change is one of life's most exhilarating challenges.

## It begins in the mind

The place where our environmental problems begin is the mind. That is where the real fight for the future of the earth will be waged. The environmental crisis is connected with all our attitudes, conscious and unconscious: toward each other, toward other countries, toward our children, toward ourselves.

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Until these attitudes change, we will go on damaging the environment, no matter what sort of surface changes we make.

I think few people realize that every one of us is the chief administrator of an Internal Environmental Protection Agency, whose jurisdiction is the mind. Each of us has an entire world within, an internal environment as real as the one we see around us.

This internal environment has a powerful effect on the external environment: the way we think affects the way we treat the earth.

Even more importantly, I would add that when we purify that inner environment, we are not only making ourselves more secure and fulfilled but we are also making an important contribution to the health of Mother Earth.

### **The paradox of our times**

To me, the central paradox of our times is that despite our powerful intellectual skills and our ingenious engineering and medical achievements, we still lack the ability to live wisely.

We send sophisticated satellites into space that beam us startling information about the destruction of the environment, yet we do little, if anything, to stop that destruction. In our lucid moments we see that we are doing great harm to ourselves and our planet, but somehow, for all our intellectual understanding, we cannot seem to change the way we think and live.

Yet the problem is not in our intellect. In itself, the intellect is neither good nor bad. The problem is simply that we have not yet completed our education. When Gandhi speaks of knowledge without character, he is not implying that we know too much for our own good. He is saying that because we do

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not understand what our real needs are, we are unable to use our tremendous technical expertise in a way that might make our lives more secure and fulfilling. Instead, we treat every problem as if it were a matter for technology, or chemistry, or economics, even when it has nothing to do with these things.

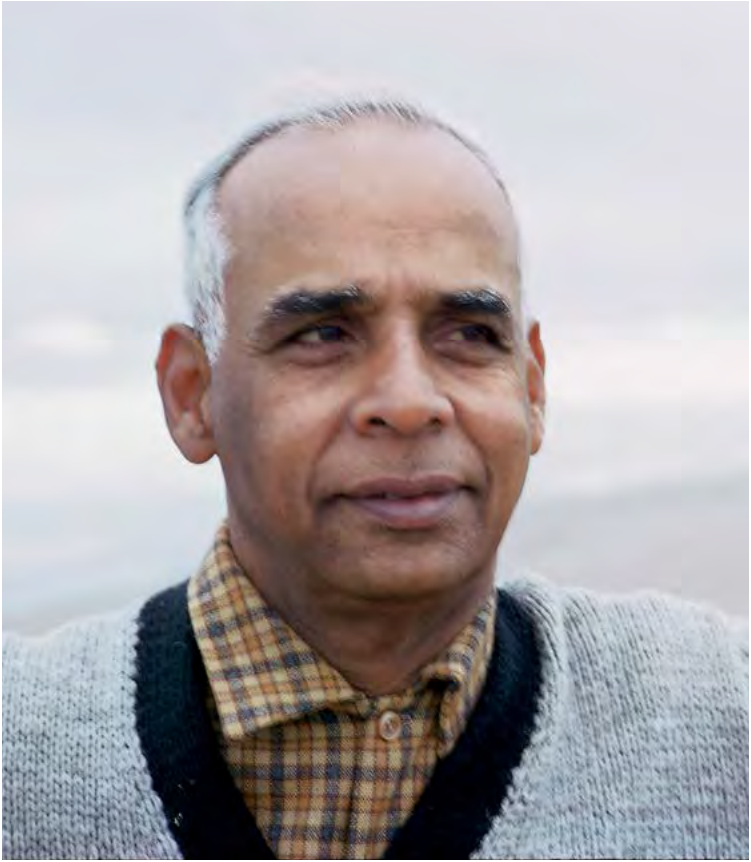
Every day, for example, dozens of new products appear, promising to satisfy our deepest desires. We are barraged with messages – subliminal and otherwise – on billboards and in magazines, on television and in the movies, telling us that everything we are looking for in life can be found in a car or a bowl of ice cream.

### **Servants to the things we bought**

The hidden message is that what we own or eat has the power to endow us with self-respect. Actually, I would say it is the other way around. Your car may be useful and comfortable, but that is not why it is dignified. You, a human being, are the one who gives dignity to your car by driving it.

I recall my grandmother bringing this spirit to every aspect of her life – and her example set the tone for our village. She was a deeply independent woman who refused to let any material possession interfere with that independence. The way she saw it, when we depend on possessions for dignity or fulfillment, we are giving away part of our freedom. We become servants to the things we bought to serve us.

My uncle, who taught English at our village school, once made this point to us with characteristic flair. He wrote on the blackboard “John owns a Ford car,” then asked us to write the same sentence in the passive voice. We all wrote “A Ford car is owned by John.” All, that is, except one fellow in the back, who had written “A Ford car owns John.”



Easwaran, 1960s.



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We started to laugh, but my uncle held up his hand. “The rest of you may know grammar,” he said, “but this young man knows life.”

Several decades later, when I first came to the United States, I was surprised to hear a young American say the same thing. “That man doesn’t own his car,” he said as one of his friends roared by in a Thunderbird. “It owns him. He’s got to work six days a week and take on extra jobs to pay for it.”

## Tyrannical master

Can’t the same thing almost be said of us? Over the past decades, the automobile, like so many of our appliances and machines, has sped down the now-familiar psychological highway from desirable luxury to basic necessity to tyrannical master.

We no longer choose to drive a car – we have to: there are so many things to do, so little time to do them, and so far to travel in between. We rush about from place to place, caught in a perilous game of catch-up, and the price is high: thousands of Americans lose their lives in traffic accidents every year.

The irony is, we are often in such a hurry that we can’t get anywhere. I have read that commute time in Tokyo and London now is often less by bicycle than by car; and to judge by rush hour on our freeways, our situation is not much different.

Worse than the loss of time, of course, is the threat to our health. An average American car pumps its own weight in carbon into the atmosphere every year – twenty pounds of carbon dioxide for every gallon of gas – accounting for a substantial portion of our total carbon dioxide emissions. Not only do these emissions poison our air, but the accumulation of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere is a major cause of the

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greenhouse effect, raising the temperature of the earth's atmosphere – with unpredictable and dangerous results.

And of course Madison Avenue has found ways to capitalize on these concerns. Not long ago, for example, I read an article about skin care. “The diminishing ozone layer, the multitudes of pollutants, the swarm of free radicals in the air, are all being flagged by cosmetic companies as hazards to the skin. It figures that a new category of products would emerge to protect the skin from the environment.”

### Internal pollutants

As I see it, it's fine for us to take good care of our skin, but why can't we lavish the same kind of care on our mind? In our internal environment, pollutants like greed, anger, and fear pose just as great a threat to our health. And, as Gandhi would have observed, those internal pollutants are the real cause of the external ones.

Our job as responsible human beings is to make the mind a favorable environment for health, happiness, love, and wisdom to flourish. Unless it is methodically purified – which is what meditation and the mantram can do – our efforts to purify our external environment will have as little effect as writing on water.

Our modern conditioning seems to specialize in methodically polluting both our internal and external environments. Everywhere we are encouraged to become addicted: to cars, to junk food, to excitement, to money.

Unfortunately, once we are addicted to something, we begin to lose sight of how our actions affect the rest of the world. When we are addicted to our cars, for example, it doesn't matter how many times we are told about the environmental

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effect — we go on driving and driving.

When we are addicted to fast food, we can't even listen to those reports about the damage that billions of fast-food containers are doing to our soil, oceans, and even air.

Addictions are also the greatest source of internal pollution. They create poisonous clouds of greed and anger and leave us nothing but insecurity to show for it.

### **Desire grows when you feed it**

Ansari of Herat put his finger on the dynamics of this kind of internal pollution. "Urged by desire, I wandered in the streets of good and evil. I gained nothing except feeding the fire of desire."

Ansari was a professor of Islamic law, and as a former professor myself, I can guess from these lines that he must have known students well. This is the experience of most human beings in their teens and twenties today. As a professor of English literature, and then as a teacher of meditation, I played Dear Abby and Ann Landers for many students over the years, when some of the best and brightest would come to me, confess some questionable adventures, and ask for advice or help. I often asked, "Why on earth did you do that?"

"I just wanted to get it out of my system." That was a favorite phrase during the sixties, and it still hasn't gone out of style.

"What you really did," I would answer point-blank, "was get it *into* your system!" That is how desire works: it only grows when you feed it.

Suppose, for example, that while you are walking to campus or work you see a beautiful Black Forest chocolate cake gleaming in a bakery window and suddenly feel tempted to eat it. That shouldn't be hard to suppose. Perhaps, instead of walking

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on by, you say to yourself, “I’d just like to look at it.” And you stop. Then you slip inside the door to have a smell. The obliging lady behind the glass-topped case serves you a wafer-thin slice, “just so you can experience the taste.”

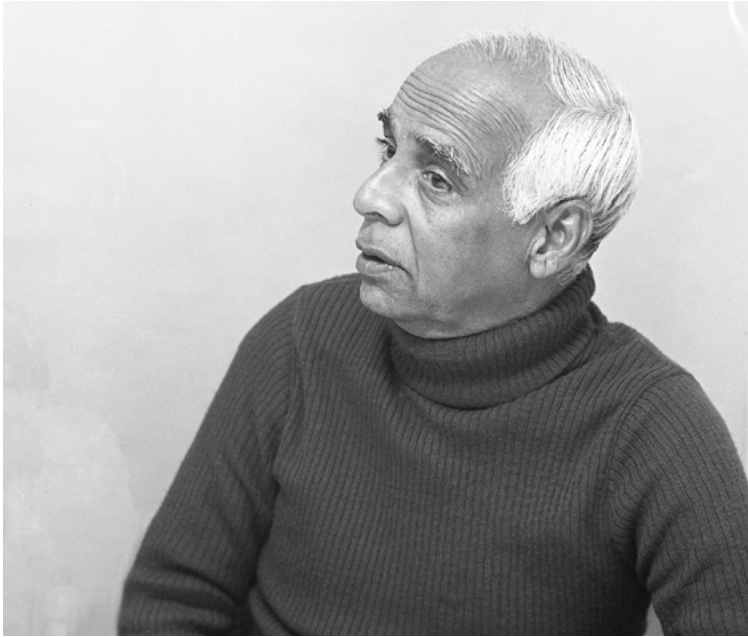
“It’s heavenly,” you agree with a smile, “but I really wasn’t going to buy any.” And you float out the door, empty-handed and free.

## Desire and compulsion

In Hindu and Buddhist psychology, however, you’re not so free as you think. There may be no cake in your hand, but there is a tinge more desire in the atmosphere of your mind. Whenever a desire is gratified, the sages say, even with a minuscule wedge of chocolate cake, it leaves a residue of conditioning added to that desire. The next time you pass by that cake in the window, your Black Forest desire will have grown a little fatter and will be clamoring a little more loudly for satisfaction. If this goes on, you will someday find yourself walking out of that bakery with a nice pink box in your hand and wondering to yourself, “Now why did I go and buy that?”

“Well,” you ask me, “what’s the harm in that?” The harm is that the desire is a little fatter and the will a little weaker. Cake, of course, is merely an example. Whether your weakness is cake, cocktails, or cocaine, when you indulge a desire over and over again, the muscles of that desire build up into a force you can no longer defy.

“Desire yielded to,” says Saint Augustine, “grows into habit, and habit not resisted becomes compulsion.” Then we no longer yield because we find pleasure in it; we yield because we have no choice. Even when the pleasure dries up, the compulsion is still there.



Easwaran, 1960s.

Augustine knew what he was talking about. He wasn't a model teenager, you know. When he went off to Carthage for college, he didn't exactly allow his various appetites to starve. It is from personal experience that he tells us how a feeble little desire, when it is indulged and encouraged, becomes bloated into an overweight, overbearing compulsion.

This is true not merely of physical indulgences. We can be addicted to attention, to power, to a particular kind of relationship, to the process of sexual attraction.

No one would deny that the things we get addicted to can be quite attractive at first. They excite us. They stimulate our fantasies. They distract us from pressing problems. But the

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fulfillment they promise is not really there, and when our response to them becomes compulsive, even the surface glitter which first attracted us will fade. The more we indulge them, the hungrier we get, and the bigger our appetite, the less satisfaction we get from indulgence.

## **The power to solve problems**

But in every addiction energy is trapped. In all our daily partialities – for food that is less than nourishing, say, or reading and entertainment that are far less than elevating – power is hidden. And a full-scale compulsion contains so much power that it can be thought of as a trail leading right into the unconscious.

When you begin to understand this, you will go looking for traps from which to release your energy. When I began to transform my life through the practice of meditation, I made the stupendous discovery that whenever I needed a lot of power to solve a problem or even more drive to go deeper in meditation, all that I had to do was to take on a strong urge and defy it.

Once I saw a sign in a bakery window, tucked among the croissants and the pinwheel cookies, which said invitingly, “Indulge Yourself.” This is the usual approach to desire. In my bakery the sign says, “Defy the Desire.” You will come out not with a little bag full of calories but with a heart full of increased security, love, and joy to share with everyone.

## **A dynamic balance**

Chemists tell us that the earth’s atmosphere is not a fixed entity but is always changing, continuously being re-formed. Every day, countless different processes combine to produce

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the air we breathe and modify the climate which brings us rain, snow, or warmth. The amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, for example, is the result of a myriad of processes: it is produced by fossil fuel combustion, the burning of rain forests, and industrial processes; and it is absorbed by trees, other vegetation, and the sea.

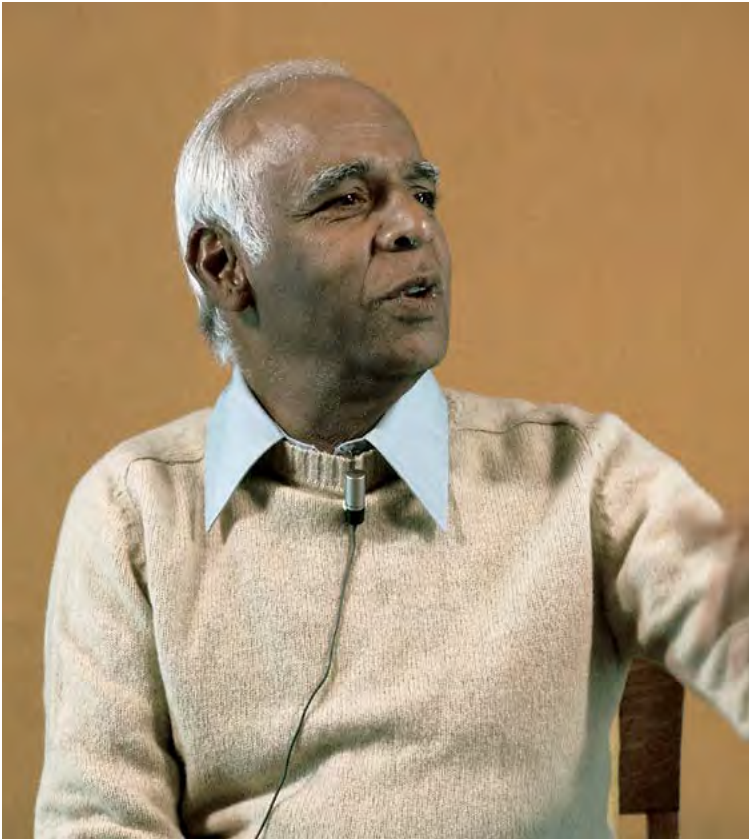
The ozone layer is another example of this kind of dynamic balance. Ozone, an unstable union of three oxygen atoms, is created by sunlight-triggered chemical reactions above the tropics and distributed by air currents around the globe. Being highly reactive, ozone is constantly breaking down in contact with other molecules; but at the same time, the interaction of sunlight and oxygen is creating new ozone molecules to replace them, thus maintaining a layer of ozone that protects living creatures from harmful ultraviolet rays.

But these balances, so necessary for life as we know it, have their limits. Cars and factories are loading the atmosphere with more carbon dioxide than it can deal with. Natural replacement processes cannot keep up with such attacks, and the result is that the air we breathe becomes laden with noxious gases and the ozone layer we depend on breaks down.

## **Our internal atmosphere**

In the internal environment, the story is the same. Some two thousand years ago a master of spiritual psychology, Patanjali, gave us one of the most practical and profound analyses of human character ever developed.

According to Patanjali, our character is being formed and shaped continuously. Anger, good will, depression, friendliness, resentment, are not fixed features of personality. They are variables which depend on what we put into our internal



Easwaran, 1970s.



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atmosphere. And although we rarely realize it, we can develop the ability to change those variables.

We can decrease our emission of pollutants like hostility, for example; and when we do, we discover native reserves of good will that can protect us against hostility in the future. Just as we worked to restore the ozone layer by refusing to use harmful CFCs, we can restore peace of mind by banning anger. We can use forgiveness to soak up and transform resentments just as nature uses trees to soak up and transform carbon dioxide into life-giving oxygen.

### **True friends of the environment**

In other words, character is a continuing process. It can be ennobled, strengthened, and purified by the enthusiastic practice of meditation and the allied disciplines.

This is great news not only for the internal environment, but for the external environment too. The cleaner the atmosphere of the mind, the harder it will be to do anything that would hurt our planet and its creatures.

When our inner freeways are no longer clogged with bumper-to-bumper desires, we become true friends of the environment. No matter what the advertisers promise us, no matter what selfish desire comes knocking at our door, we will always ask the question, “Will this have a deleterious effect on the air which we and our children breathe? If so, go knocking elsewhere – you’ll find no welcome here.”

### **A total clean-up**

A medieval Christian mystic gave us three simple procedures for effecting a total environmental clean-up, both inside and out: “Be kind, be kind, be kind.” Be kind in your actions

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by never doing anything to hurt other people, other creatures, or the environment. Be kind in your words, so you can work harmoniously with others to conserve and protect our resources. And, finally, be kind in your thoughts, since it is from our thoughts that our actions and words arise. Without some control over the thinking process, it is impossible to make lasting changes in the way we live.

This kind of control is no easy task. It requires constant attention. “One has to work day and night to plow and to clean the field of the soul,” says the Sufi mystic Sanai. Or, as Ansari puts it, “Watch vigilantly the state of thine own mind. Love of God begins in harmlessness.” And not only love of God: love of Mother Earth, too, begins in a mind free from ill will.

### **Purifying through forgiveness**

As Gandhi says, it is possible for any one of us to purify our internal environment to such an extent that ill will cannot arise even in our sleep. There is no miracle in this, simply a lot of hard work: being kind, being kind, being kind throughout the day.

When you have learned the difficult but very precious art of being kind in thought, word, and deed, your inner atmosphere will be sparkingly clear, fresh, and fragrant with compassion. In the language of mysticism, you will be living in heaven. It is not that you will be unaware if people around you get agitated or depressed, or that you won't suffer if unkind things are said to you. But your peace of mind will not be disturbed.

This is the only goal worth striving for. Only mastery of the thinking process can lead to permanent peace of mind, and permanent peace of mind is heaven.

So every one of us can aim at heaven – not after death but

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right here on earth. That is a career worth throwing yourself into! Rumi put it beautifully:

Whoever flees from a master in this world flees good fortune. Know this! You have learned a trade to make a livelihood for your body. Now grasp the trade of religion! You have become clothed and wealthy in the world. What will you do when you leave this place?

Learn a trade through which you can earn the income of forgiveness in the next world!

All of us can start earning the income of forgiveness right here and now; there is no need to wait for some afterlife. The more we forgive, the more we are forgiven – the more we forgive ourselves. That is what Saint Francis means when he says, “It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.”

So when someone is impolite to you, seize the opportunity: that is the time to be exceptionally polite in return. You will be picking up a quick paycheck. When a friend lets you down or hurts your feelings, forgive him. Not only will you be purifying your own internal atmosphere, but you will be making it easier for him to purify his.

## Freeing the mind

The mystics tell us that peace of mind comes only when we acquire the capacity to live free from all conditioned habits of thought and action. The key here is attention: gaining the capacity to direct our mind as we choose, so that it never gets trapped by any undesirable focus. A trapped mind is compulsive; a mind that goes where you choose is free.

William James, the famous American psychologist, gave an

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unintended summary of the power of meditation when he said that the ability to direct attention is the very root of judgment, character, and will. Let me try to explain how this ability is developed through the practice of meditation.

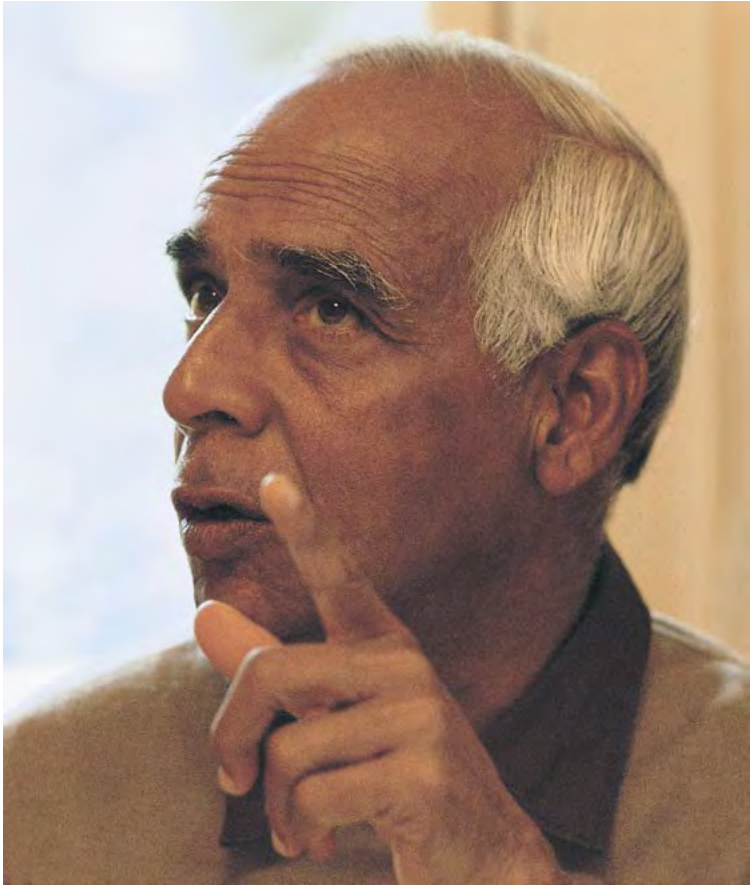
## Highest ideals

At the heart of the method of meditation I teach is an inspirational passage that embodies your highest ideals: the last eighteen verses of the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, for example, which paint a vivid portrait of the man or woman whose wisdom is so unshakable that it can never be swept away by the storms of conditioning which blow through our modern world.

In meditation, you go through that passage in your mind as slowly as you can, with as much concentration as you can muster. And every time your attention wanders, you simply bring it back. You may have to bring it back thirty times in thirty minutes, but every time you do, you are training your attention to go where you choose instead of jumping and wandering. What you are doing is learning to drive with judgment and discrimination through the unfamiliar landscape of the mind.

It takes a long, long time to master this art, mostly because of the intense conditioning which has convinced us that we have no control over the inner world. But when your thoughts obey you, you can drive your mind in one and the same lane, the lane of love, all the way from morning to evening. It's like traveling down Interstate 5 from Sacramento to L.A. without ever weaving into somebody else's lane.

In order to be greedy, you have to be distracted into



Easwaran, 1980s.

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changing lanes. In order to be angry, you have to change lanes. In order to be afraid, you have to change lanes. If you have learned this marvelous skill of staying in the same lane always – the lane of patience, of forgiveness, of wisdom – nobody can push you out.

## **Practice inner environmentalism**

During the day, after your meditation, there are abundant opportunities to develop this capacity and practice inner environmentalism. When you find yourself straying into anger, for example, don't act on it; don't talk about it; don't even think about it. Acting and thinking about it are what pulls you into the next lane. Instead, try to keep both hands on the steering wheel of your mind.

How? I can give a simple secret: keep your mind on your mantram, and, if possible, go for a long, fast walk. Walk and repeat your mantram until you feel the anger dispersing like a sulfurous cloud in a fresh ocean breeze. Then, when your internal environment has cleared, you can go back and deal with the situation with a calm mind.

Each time you do this, you are withdrawing your attention from anger and putting it into forgiveness. As James says, the person who can do this will have excellent judgment, because he or she will see clearly – not only the road just ahead but the distant consequences just barely visible over the horizon.

This kind of judgment is the very foundation of the sustainability consciousness our planet needs. When you can see clearly how your actions affect the environment, you cannot imagine wanting to do anything to hurt the earth or damage the atmosphere.

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## The love of all creation

Each of us can take steps to minimize our wants, learning to live in reasonable comfort and artistic simplicity. Such steps come naturally when we begin to clean up our internal environment. We can begin each day with half an hour of meditation and gradually withdraw our love from the dazzling objects that beckon from every direction.

When we find fulfillment within ourselves, our love will be free to flow out toward all the children of our beautiful Mother Earth. When the love of God and of all creation rises like a fountain from the depths of consciousness, all other desires are overwhelmed and, as Meister Eckhart says, the pauper dies, and the prince or princess is born. 🌸

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## Great Life-Giving Spirit

### *Native American Tradition*

Giver of all life, I pray to you from the earth,  
help me to remember as I touch the earth  
that I am little and need your pity.  
Help me to be thankful for the gift of the earth  
and never to walk hurtfully on the world.  
Bless me to love what comes from Mother Earth  
and teach me how to love your gifts.

Great Spirit of the heavens,  
lift me up to you  
that my heart may worship you  
and come to you in glory.  
Hold in my memory that you are my Creator,  
greater than I,  
eager for my good life.  
Let everything that is in the world  
lift my mind,  
and my heart,  
and my life to you  
so that we may come always to you  
in truth and in heart.





At Ramagiri Ashram.

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## Community Story

# Desire and Forgiveness

My family of origin was large and we were a quarrelsome lot, with lots of small battles going on among us, typical of many families. But let someone from outside the home criticize or hurt any one of us, and we became a mighty united front. Our scorn and scheming were now turned on our new common enemy who we could shun and spread gossip about — acceptable forms of revenge in our small town.

Fast forward 25 years or so, and I encounter a man whose teachings fly in the face of so much I held true. Easwaran seemed to ask the impossible, and held out a promise of increasing joy for those who were willing to follow his eight-point program. The challenge appealed to me, especially as it was tempered by Easwaran's wisdom about being gentle and playful when tackling the seemingly impossible.

### A place to start

“Unification of desires” popped up over and over in his writings and talks, and this seemed elusive — perhaps even unnecessary. After all, my desires were fairly harmless, at least the desires I was consciously aware of. Dark comedies, french fries, happy hour with colleagues, crime dramas on TV. OK, maybe I was a bit obsessed about new clothes. A place to start.

Over time, fueled by the power of meditation and the mantram, I was able to chip away at all these small wants

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of mine. At the same time, meditation was shining a light on some of the bigger, more destructive desires lurking behind these distractions. The desire to be right, desire for attention, desire to have my own way.

Could giving up that new dress really do anything about these giants? Yet, there had been changes. I was able to make healthier choices about things, to accept criticism more readily, to find forgiveness in my heart when someone caused suffering for me.

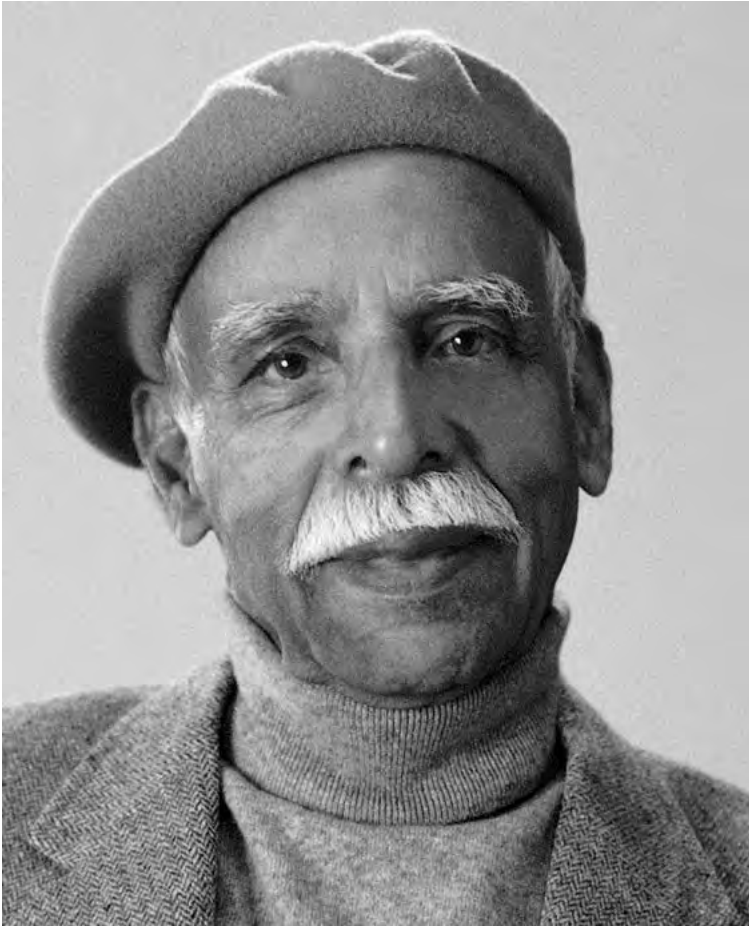
### **The miracle of forgiveness**

Then, an elderly in-law said something very unkind to my husband, who was badly hurt by it. The childhood tribal streak reared its scornful head. Fantasies of biting rejoinders and ways to snub this person filled my mind day and night. Made me crazy actually. And this was something that I had learned I had tools to overcome — eight of them.

So, I started writing mantrams for this elderly person. Used my “peace” passages in meditation. Chose to write him newsy friendly letters instead of watching a TV episode. Called him on the phone just to chat, taking a mantram walk beforehand to steady the mind. (Afterwards too sometimes!)

Finally, the miracle of forgiveness: I could view this elderly man with true affection in my heart. All the work on the small desires had built up the will just enough to take the energy from a long-standing vengeful streak — and use it to feed the desire to draw closer to that joy we all really want. Much gratitude for our teacher.

— A member of the BMCM Affiliate Program



Easwaran, 1980s.

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# Healing Our Seas

Eknath Easwaran

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll!  
Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;  
Man marks the earth with ruin, – his control  
Stops with the shore.

– Byron

The other day, as I took my morning walk on the shore of the Pacific, I recalled these haunting lines of Byron’s, in which he pours out his heart to the sea. When I first memorized those words, they seemed to express a permanent truth. For Byron the sea seemed a world unto itself, safe from the machinations of greed and the lust for conquest. “Man marks the earth with ruin – his control stops with the shore.”

Alas, Lord Byron, no more. Industrial society’s reach has extended deep into the sea. Pollution, depletion of the ozone layer, global warming – these man-made threats are changing the chemistry, biology, temperature, and perhaps even the size of the ocean. As Bill McKibben argues so convincingly in his book *The End of Nature*, our wasteful lifestyle is depriving nature of its mysterious, awe-inspiring independence.

Yet there are two other verses about the sea which I often recall, both from the Bhagavad Gita. Together they hold out the promise of a much different way of life – a way of life which could restore the ocean, the air, the forests, and the topsoil to health.

## The basis of environmental efforts

The first is Sri Krishna’s epic statement, “Among bodies of

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water, I am the ocean.” The Lord does not say merely “I made the ocean”; he says, “I am the ocean.” To me, this is the basis of all our environmental efforts, and it accords perfectly with what ecologists and marine biologists tell us about the importance of the sea.

What Sri Krishna is saying is that we should treat the sea with the same respect and love we feel for our highest, most noble ideal. When we look at the sea, we are not just looking at a vast expanse of water; we are looking at the life of our children. How can we pollute it? Without the health of the sea, our children will not be healthy. If the sea dies, so does their future — and our own.

To look at the sea in this way is to see the infinite tenderness and compassion of God, by whatever name we use — Sri Krishna or Christ, Allah or the Divine Mother or simply Mother Nature. The sea has been given to us to support us, to balance our climate, to provide a home for whales and seals and dolphins. When we pollute it we are ignoring and abusing that compassion in a way unfitting for human beings.

### **An attack on the oceans**

Unfortunately, under the intoxicating influence of the mass media and a wasteful way of life, we have become unwitting participants in a massive attack on the world’s oceans. Millions of barrels of oil are spilled or dumped into the ocean every year, over half a million from tankers feeding the world’s appetite for gasoline. Nitrates from chemical fertilizers are washed down to the sea where they stimulate the growth of algae, thereby often suffocating fish. Toxic waste from landfills and from our own kitchen sinks filters down through the groundwater system, ending up in the sea. And our plastic litter, left

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carelessly on the beach, kills many thousands of sea gulls, seals, and other creatures every year.

## Consumption and waste

The root cause of all this pollution is a way of life built on a kind of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde team: consumption and waste. On the surface, consumption is a model citizen — “the very pink of the proprieties,” as Robert Louis Stevenson describes his Dr. Jekyll. It gives the economy a quick fix, it makes for a steady stream of novelty, and best of all, it is easy.

So, when our Dr. Jekyll prescribes “an increase in consumer spending,” we are only too happy to take the medicine and turn a blind eye to the less savory activities of his alter ego.

And they are unsavory. On the average, every man, woman, and child in America throws away more than twenty-five pounds of garbage each week. Indeed, city dumps are one of Mr. Hyde’s specialties. Aside from the question of where we will put our garbage when landfills are exhausted, the garbage glut poses several other dangers. As landfill trash decomposes, a toxic chemical cocktail leaches into the groundwater system. At the same time, as it decomposes, the trash releases methane, one of the gases responsible for climate change. It is not uncommon for fires and explosions to occur on these landfills as methane is ignited.

Now that the environment has become an important concern among consumers, many corporations are proclaiming that they have found a way to tame Mr. Hyde. Every day, elaborate new plans and promises appear. This time, we are assured, we can invite Dr. Jekyll into our home and entrust him with the health of our children’s planet. “Plastics are recyclable. You can make bathtubs and park benches out of them,” says Dr. Jekyll,

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“so why stop using them? All you need to do is buy more; we’ll take care of the waste problem.” When we look skeptical, he assures us firmly, “Hyde has turned over a new leaf. He combs his hair now and brushes his teeth. Why hold the past against him? Give him another chance!”

Unfortunately, despite all his efforts at self-improvement, Mr. Hyde remains Mr. Hyde. Worldwide, hundreds of billions of pounds of plastic are produced each year. And a recent California clean-up found that half of all the garbage on California beaches is plastic.

### **Use our common sense**

Recycling all this plastic sounds like a good idea, but it has yet to show signs of lasting success. Companies must go to absurd lengths to recycle plastic, since, unlike glass and aluminium, much plastic cannot be recycled into the same products. For example, waste plastic from the Bay Area is sent across the Pacific to Hong Kong, where it is shredded, pelletized, and then shipped to China. Chinese factories turn it into carpets, paint brushes, and other products, then ship it back to the United States. It is these Chinese factories which have stopped buying plastic, since it is now cheaper for them to buy petroleum and make their products from scratch.

Can you imagine? All this shipping and processing just to justify our production in the United States of twelve billion pounds of plastic packaging – an average of thirty pounds per person! Why don’t we just use less plastic?

“But we’ll always need carpets and paint brushes,” protests Dr. Jekyll. “Why not produce them from waste plastics?”

This is where we should use our common sense and ask him the obvious question: “Yes, we do need carpets and paint





Easwaran, 1980s.

brushes, but do we need twelve billion pounds of them each year? Is it realistic to think that even a small fraction of that vast amount can be recycled, even at a time when waste plastic is in demand? And how much of that unrecycled plastic will end up littering our beaches?”

I wouldn't put all the blame on Dr. Jekyll. Clearly, common sense has not been our guide. It is we who have taken Dr. Jekyll's miracle cure eagerly to heart and made shopping – and waste – a national pastime. Even now, as more and more evidence of our damage to the sea is presented, we go on buying and selling, using and throwing away as much as possible.

Please understand, I am all in favor of having everything necessary for a comfortable, civilized life. I even understand

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the place for a few well-chosen luxuries. But let us keep in mind the health of Mother Earth. I buy good clothes, but I treat them with care so they will last a long time. At this moment I am wearing a fine wool jacket which I have worn every winter for ten years. To preserve the health of our planet we needn't live like rustics; we simply need to live with care.

The media, on the other hand, would have us believe that consumption is the only sure way to happiness. Not so. In fact, Madison Avenue found it quite a challenge when they first tried to convince us that Mr. Hyde is a model citizen.

### Stimulating the urge to buy

In his book, Professor Stuart Ewen describes the advertising industry's all-out effort during the 1930s and 1940s to convince a basically thrifty public to accept and even enjoy waste. He quotes from a 1930 article by advertising man Earnest Elmo Calkins:

The purpose is to make the customer discontented with his old type of fountain pen, kitchen utensil, bathroom, or motor car, because it is old-fashioned, out-of-date. The technical term for this idea is *obsolescence*. We no longer wait for things to wear out. We displace them with others that are not more effective but more attractive.

“By the late 1940s,” writes Professor Ewen, “conditions had changed, but [the industrial designer J. Gordon] Lippincott still spoke of the need to combat thrift-oriented thought: ‘The major problem confronting us is how to *move this merchandise to the American consumer*. The major problem therefore is one of stimulating the urge to buy! . . . Our willingness to part with something *before* it is completely worn out is . . . truly

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an American habit, and it is soundly based on our economy of abundance. It must be further nurtured even though it is contrary to one of the oldest inbred laws of humanity – the law of thrift – of providing for the unknown and often-feared day of scarcity.”

## A more reliable physician

Somehow, this does not seem like a step in the right direction. I have a different suggestion: in place of Dr. Jekyll, let's hire a more reliable physician.

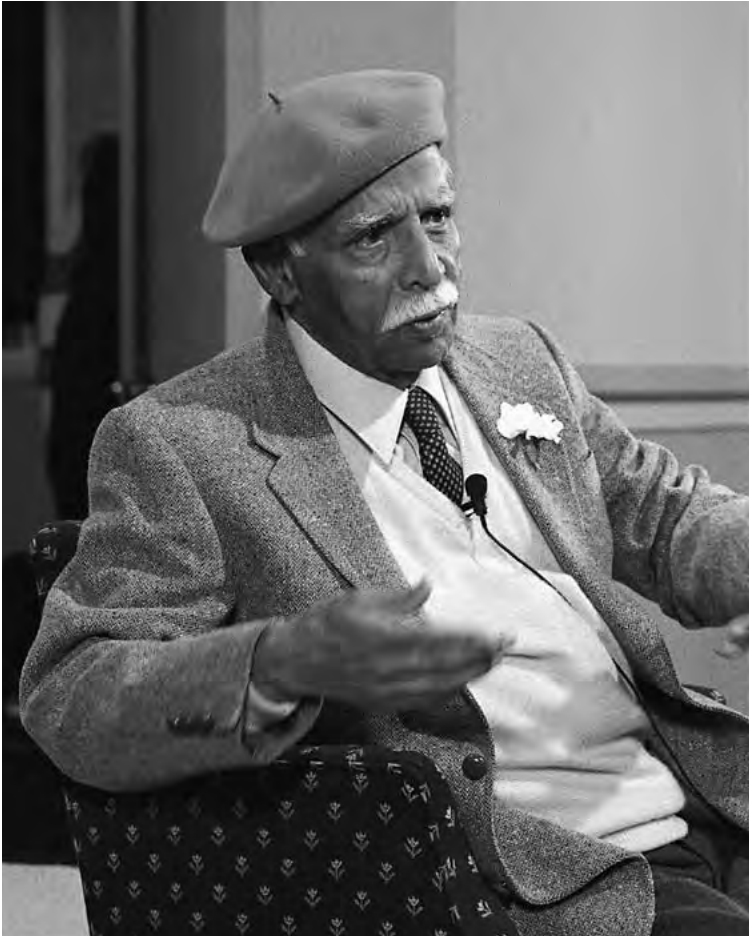
Ansari of Herat recommends one, and gives him the highest recommendation:

He knoweth all our good and evil.  
Nothing is hidden from him.  
He knoweth what is the best medicine  
To cure the pain and to rescue the fallen.

This physician is none other than our own highest Self, whom Ansari calls simply “Lord,” whom we can approach directly through the practice of meditation.

And in another verse, Ansari hints at the cure this physician prescribes: “O Lord, give me a heart free from the flames of desire.”

The Lord is a superb diagnostician, and he has no trouble in spotting the source of our difficulties: we are so concerned with ourselves, with the fulfillment of our personal desires, that we are blind to the unity of life. So we go on piling up garbage, abusing and polluting the beautiful, vast gift which is the sea. The antidote? Let us gradually try to reduce our selfish desires through the practice of meditation. Let us make it our goal to wake up to the beauty of a compassionate universe, and to treat



Easwaran, 1980s.

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it with the respect and love it deserves.

In place of “Indulge yourself!” let us take up that beautiful phrase which captures the essence of Gandhi’s life: “Live simply, that others may simply live.” And “others” means not only other people, but the rest of life – animals, birds, fish, forests, and oceans. If plastics are bad for the environment, if our wastage is poisoning earth and sea, why don’t we just stop using so much plastic and reduce the amount of wastage we produce? Isn’t that common sense?

### **Clean up the toxic waste**

The benefits of such a simple way of life are enormous. For one thing, we will be cleaning up our internal environment, which has been overwhelmed by an attack no less deadly than the one directed at our oceans. Today most of us live in a world of exaggerated desires – and the anger and frustration that goes with having fat desires that the world cannot easily satisfy. After years of going through life always wanting, wanting, wanting, the human being reaches a threshold of tolerance where even a minor provocation can touch off an explosion.

In this sense, our subconscious has become something like a toxic waste disposal site, where the residues created by exaggerated desires – toxins like resentment, anger, fear, and lust – seep down and collect. If we do not work hard to place other people’s success and happiness higher on our list of priorities than our own, these by-products will leak out into our lives, poisoning our relationships, flaring up in unexpected bouts of resentment, and contributing to ulcers and heart disease.

Many years ago, a friend took me to a meeting in Oakland where a highly successful man was teaching people the art of living. He was going around the audience asking everyone,

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“What is your burning desire?” I was amazed at the candor with which people expressed themselves; I had never suspected that there were so many distinct burning desires in the world. Almost all in the group came straight out with what was preoccupying their minds.

Finally the man came to me. “And you, sir, what is your burning desire?”

I didn’t plan my response; it came from the depths of my consciousness. “I have only one burning desire,” I said: “to have no burning desires at all.”

## A sea of peace

To use Gandhi’s famous words, my ambition is to become zero. This has nothing to do with poverty or asceticism. In fact, the man or woman who has reduced selfish desires to zero, who lives for the health and joy of all, is the wealthiest, happiest person on earth. Life becomes filled with invigorating challenges and the endless security of knowing that whatever comes, you will be equal to it. You can enjoy all of life’s innocent pleasures, while never slipping into compulsive habits or being manipulated by the media.

The Bhagavad Gita, in the second of the verses I mentioned earlier, compares such a person to a sea of peace:

As the rivers flow into the ocean, but cannot make the vast ocean overflow, so flow the magic streams of the sense world into the sea of peace that is the sage.

This verse is part of a brilliant portrait of the man or woman who has trained the mind to be free from what Ansari calls the flames of selfish desire and the drive for self-aggrandizement.

This is no easy task. Nowadays, we are encouraged to drain

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a desire the moment it wells up in our heart. “Are you hungry?” ask the ads. “Then why wait?” It requires a long period of systematic training — of the mind, the senses, the intellect — to unlearn this conditioned impatience and to learn instead the skill of patience, of letting the heart fill up with desire whose power we can draw on to benefit all of life.

## Conserving our desires

Rumi has some beautiful verses on our desires and how we should deal with them:

The troops of imagination arrive unwearied from behind the heart’s curtain.

If these ideas do not come from a single plantation, how is it they arrive one by one at the heart?

Company after company, the army of our ideas hurries to the fountain of the heart in thirst.

They fill their jugs and go, constantly appearing and disappearing.

In his own way, Rumi is asking us not to identify with our desires, not to attach them to particular objects. Our capacity to desire can be as great as the Pacific Ocean if we learn to conserve that desire, letting it flow in ever-increasing floods into our heart and harnessing its power in selfless service.

I have always looked on having powerful desires as a great advantage in life. It means that you have a lot of gas in your tank, that you cannot be satisfied with tiny pleasures that come and go, no matter how many of them you may manage to collect.

Most of us, of course, do not begin life with this kind of concentration. We pour out our precious capacity for desire at

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every opportunity, hoping to transform it by the power of wishful thinking into something permanent. We would do better to conserve our desires, to let them pour into our hearts as the rivers pour into the sea. In this way, desire swells into inexhaustible vitality, enthusiasm, patience, willpower, concentration, and courage.

### **Putting the power of desire to work**

It is desire that lends to fleeting experience the appearance of permanence. We want so badly for things to last. More than anything, we human beings need permanence in life. And it is this huge hunger which we can actually nurture, to fuel our search for something that will really stay with us. “Spend less time seeking water,” Rumi challenges us, “and acquire thirst! Then water will gush from above and below.”

In another passage, Rumi likens the deep desire for permanence with physical hunger and tells us what it is for. “God,” he says, “has given hunger to his elect so that they may become mighty lions.” And again:

Indeed, hunger is the sultan of remedies. Place hunger in the soul – regard it not with such contempt!

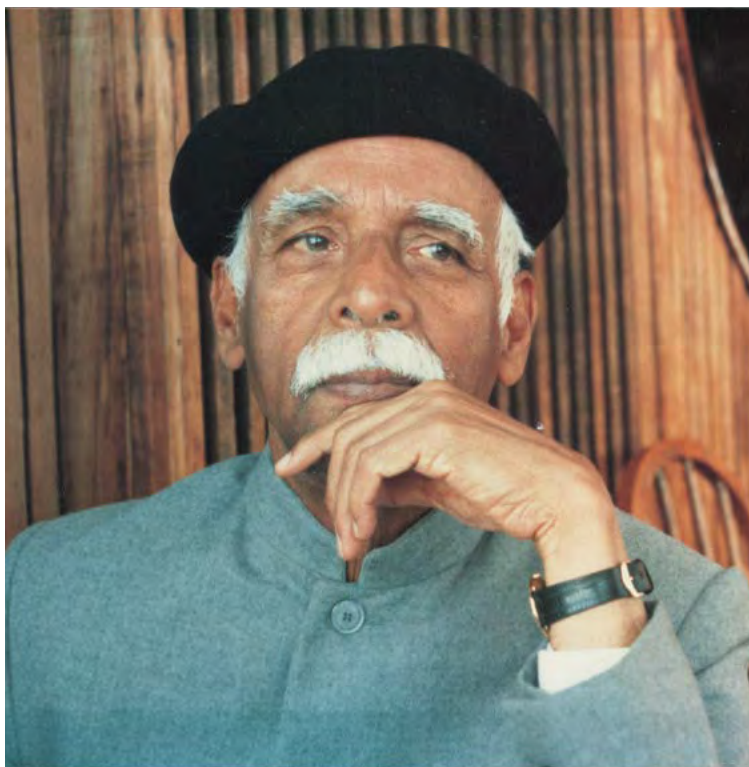
Hunger makes all unpleasant things pleasant – but without it, all pleasant things are rejected.

Through a systematic training of the mind, these great mystics tell us, we can gradually renounce every desire that is not in our own best interests, putting the power of that desire to work in spiritual effort and selfless service. This gradual unification of desire is the essence of spiritual living.





Easwaran and his wife Christine, 1970s.



Easwaran, 1980s.

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## The importance of one-pointed attention

In meditation, we train the will by bringing attention back to the lofty words of the inspirational passage. Then, during the rest of the day, we use the other seven points to keep attention where we choose rather than where it wanders.

That is the supreme importance of one-pointed attention, of course. When we concentrate deeply, even for just a few moments, there is a respite from the ceaseless conflict between conditioned self-interest and our desire to love; there is a short truce in the war between pleasure and conscience.

The trouble is that most people – even great scientists and artists – have, at best, only partial control over their attention. Even when they can forget themselves at work, the battle rages on during the rest of the day and night. We rarely realize it, but this conflict between pleasure and conscience, which is present in everyone’s mind, is a constant drain on our energy and vital capacities.

## The voice of love

It is as if two voices were speaking in our minds at once, competing for our attention. One voice, that of conditioning, is saying, “Look out for number one. Life’s too short not to have and do everything you want. It is in grabbing that we receive.”

The other voice – love – speaks quietly from the innermost depths of our being, saying to the world, “Your cares are also my cares, and so are your joys. How can I be happy if you are miserable?”

Like Saint Francis in his “Canticle of the Sun,” love does not say “Earth, the resource to be mined,” but “Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us and brings forth varied fruits, bright flowers, and plants.”

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And not “Ocean, the receptacle for waste,” but “Sister Water, who is useful and humble, precious and pure.”

Together with meditation and the mantram, the practice of one-pointed attention — doing just one thing at a time, and giving it your full attention — can help you improve your ability to listen only to the voice of love.

## **A sea of kindness and compassion**

In this way, little by little, it is possible to build up the muscles of the will until at last you can learn to change the course of even those great rivers of anger, greed, jealousy, competitiveness, and fear which roll through the unconscious, sweeping away your security, your relationships, your joy. Like changing the course of the Mississippi, it takes time, patience, and perseverance; but it can be done.

Through the same power by which we fell, the mystics promise, we can lift ourselves up again. In this consumer society, the tremendous power of desire has often worked against us, poisoning our internal environment and desecrating the environment outside.

But that same power can be harnessed for healing our seas, and for making of ourselves a sea of kindness, patience, and active compassion. Is there any more important contribution we can make to the health and well-being of our children? Is there any better way to worship the Lord? 🌸

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## God Makes the Rivers to Flow

### *The Rig Veda*

God makes the rivers to flow. They tire not, nor do they cease from flowing. May the river of my life flow into the sea of love that is the Lord.

May I overcome all the impediments in my course. May the thread of my song be not cut before my life merges in the sea of love.

Guard me against all danger, O Lord. Accept me graciously, O King of kings.

Release me from my sorrows, which hold me as ropes hold a calf. I cannot even open my eyes without the power of your love.

Guard us against the grief that haunts the life of the selfish. Lead us from darkness into light.

We will sing of your love as it was sung of old. Your laws change not, but stand like the mountains.

Forgive me all the mistakes I have committed. Many mornings will dawn upon us again. Guide us through them all, O Lord of Love.



Retreatants on the beach where Easwaran and Christine used to take mantram walks.



With Christine Easwaran.

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## Community Story

# Unburdening

Last year, my wife and I took a four-day weekend off from work. We didn't feel like enduring the hassle of travel and decided to stay home — a home filled with the accumulations of thirty years.

My wife accepted — reluctantly at first — the idea that it would be fun to spend the mornings unburdening ourselves from the buildup of stuff, if we spent some of the afternoon time exploring nature and local attractions. It turned out to be immensely satisfying to get rid of possessions that had served a purpose at a different life stage, but that were now just cluttering our lives.

We filled eight boxes with books for our library used book sale and vowed to do more downloading of ebooks from the library rather than buying new ones. We filled eight large bags with clothes, and savored the new ease in finding outfits in our loosely-filled closets and drawers.

We gave away things we didn't need and, in the process, kindled conversations and tightened connections across generations and neighbors. We added to landfill and promised ourselves to think twice before contributing to the world's demand for stuff.

We didn't tell anyone else what they should do but we could see how the joy of our unfettering stimulated their longing to liberate some possessions, and in the process, free themselves.



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## An exercise in detachment

When we first started, we carefully went through each item in the accumulations. But as the mantrams did their work, what was really liberating was to get rid of big chunks of stuff by using the rule that if we hadn't used it for two years, we didn't need it. That exercise in detachment continues to pay itself forward with lightness in living life.

After each half day of making room in our house, we hiked or biked in nature or walked to an evening concert at a local church. We slept well, much better than if we'd burned fossil fuels flying to some exotic location and returned home overstimulated and exhausted.

This local journey was a fossil-free vehicle for slowing down, investing one-pointed attention, and engaging the mantram. It trained our senses by loosening our attachments to stuff, while deepening the channels of thought that put others first.

## A real vacation

Easwaran instructs us to periodically do a red pencil exercise in which we eliminate unnecessary tasks from our lives. It turns out, it's joyful and helpful to do the same thing with unnecessary things in our lives. In our case, this four-day weekend simplified our daily life by eliminating clutter. It unburdened our children and their children, who will have less stuff to deal with when we are gone. It made us more mindful in using resources in the present and in the future. It was a gift to current and future generations, and a real vacation for us.

— An Eight-Point Program Practitioner

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## Community Story

# A Sigh of Relief

I've had a long-time interest in pottery and recently saw someone's beautiful ceramic art on a social media app. A week later, an ad popped up about a pottery course in my city — very interesting and not too expensive, either. But I found myself pausing to reflect on whether it would be a good idea to sign up.

Last year I took up a craft to replace a less-sadhana-friendly hobby I was struggling with, and it is working fairly well with my sadhana, but it does tempt me to buy more supplies than I need and spend more online time on it than I want to. Taking on pottery now, I thought, will mean more investment: on supplies, reading about techniques and practicing them, making space for the equipment.

But if I saw it this way, I might never learn pottery in my life, my mind pointed out.

I looked at the chain of expenditure hidden behind the idea of the class — and how it could weaken my sadhana — and closed the ad with a mental sigh of relief.

— An Eight-Point Program Practitioner

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## Four Things That Bring Much Inward Peace

*Thomas à Kempis*

My child, now will I teach thee the way of peace and true liberty.

*O Lord, I beseech thee, do as thou sayest, for this is delightful for me to hear.*

Be desirous, my child, to work for the welfare of another rather than seek thine own will.

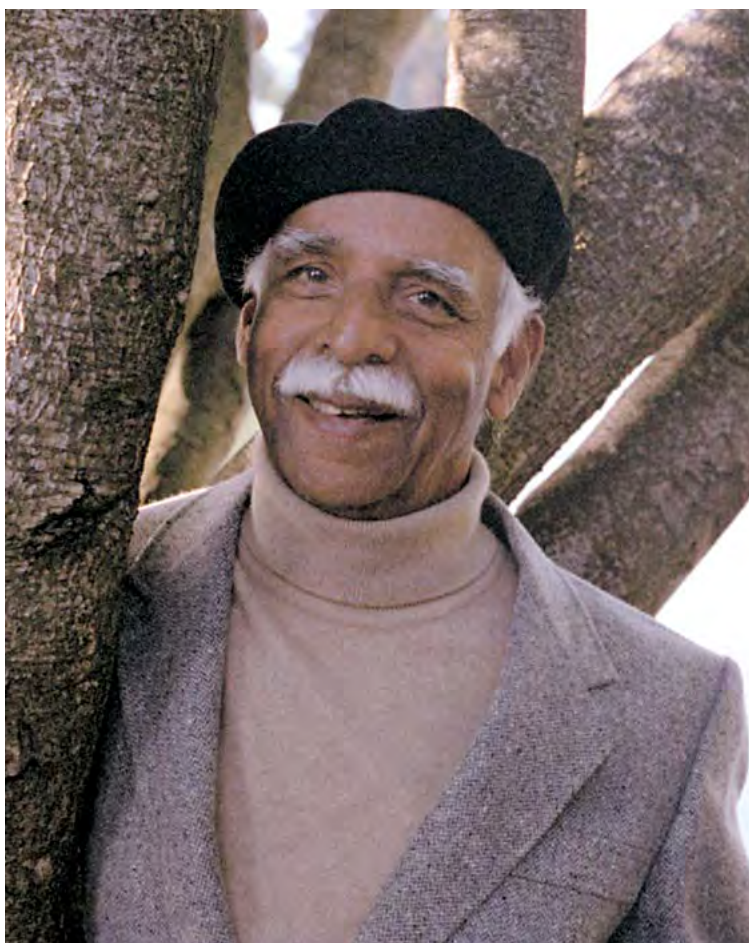
Choose always to have less rather than more.

Seek always the lowest place, and to be inferior to everyone.

Wish always, and pray, that the will of God may be wholly fulfilled in thee.

Behold, such a one entereth within the borders of peace and rest.

*O Lord, this short discourse of thine containeth within itself much perfection. It is little to be spoken, but full of meaning, and abundant in fruit. . . . Thou who canst do all things, and ever lovest the profiting of my soul, increase in me thy grace, that I may be able to fulfill thy words, and to work out mine own salvation.*



Easwaran, 1980s.

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# Your Life Is Your Message

Eknath Easwaran

Our lives affect all the other creatures, plants, and elements around us. They all depend upon us for support and protection. But rather than supporting the rest of life, human beings often seem to be at odds with it. Many of our social and business activities are not only driving other species to extinction but are threatening the water, soil, and atmosphere on which our own lives depend.

We seem to have trouble relating even to our own species. The tension and alienation of our inner cities, the increase in poverty and homelessness, the drug abuse and high suicide rate among our young people all suggest that we lack the wisdom to protect ourselves, let alone the rest of nature.

## A way to live in harmony

Yet in another sense, there is great promise today. Around the world – even in some of the countries most troubled by poverty or civil war or pollution – many thoughtful people are making a deep, concerted search for a way to live in harmony with each other and the earth.

Their efforts, which rarely reach the headlines, are among the most important events occurring today. Sometimes these people call themselves peace workers, at other times environmentalists, but most of the time they work in humble anonymity. They are simply quiet people changing the world by changing themselves.

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Through such unobtrusive, almost inaudible work, the changes we would like to see in the world around us can begin immediately in our own lives, making us more secure, more contented, and more effective. Each of us has the capacity to become a healing and protecting force in the family, with friends, at work, in the community, in the environment.

### **A powerful instrument of change**

Such little changes can seem painfully small when compared to the kinds of crises we read about in the headlines, but through my personal experience I have become convinced that there is no instrument of change more powerful than the well-lived life.

Having had the privilege of growing up in Mahatma Gandhi's India, walking with him, studying his life, and trying to live by his example, I can say that his simple, loving life has done more to benefit the world than all the speeches and policies composed by politicians in this century – however eloquent, however well-meaning.

Once, while Mahatma Gandhi's train was pulling slowly out of the station, a reporter ran up to him and asked for a message to take back to his people. Gandhi's reply was a hurried line scrawled on a scrap of paper: "My life is my message."

This is the message which all our children are waiting and hoping for. In the coming decades they face the daunting prospect of inheriting our world, with its debts, its national antagonisms, its injured environment. What they are often trying to express through anger or rebellion is a need to be loved – not through words or gifts, but through our personal example. How else will they know that living in harmony with each other and the earth is possible?

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## A spiritual foundation

Taken together, these small daily efforts to improve our ordinary lives add up to a very powerful force that, in the years to come, can become a kind of spiritual revolution, providing a firm foundation for the kind of political, economic, and ecological improvements we need to make.

In the past two centuries, the world has seen several revolutions. Some of them have brought salutary changes, while others have brought only suffering, but I would venture to say that none of them has brought us the peace our minds are hungering for or the love our hearts are thirsting for. Without such a spiritual foundation, I don't think any political or economic policy, however new, however brilliant, can fill the crying needs of humanity or protect the earth from the pressure those unfilled needs exert on it.

## Start with yourself

What I am referring to goes well beyond what we normally call social change. While I have the deepest respect for all those working selflessly to serve the world, many of the so-called "reformers" I have seen both in India and this country have an unpromising approach. They look down from the soapbox or pulpit and say, "Let me reform you, Diane, and you, Steve, and of course you, Bob."

If Bob says, "What about you?" they reply, "Oh, that can wait. Let me start with Diane and Steve and you."

That is a familiar refrain in international politics, international economics, international aid, even international education. But the great spiritual teachers of all religions – men and women who have devoted their lives to the art of living in complete harmony, like Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, the

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Compassionate Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi – say, “Oh no! You start with yourself.”

There is not much purpose served by preaching to others or by talking at them. The only way to influence people for the better – your family, your friends, your club, your class, your clinic, your society, even your enemies – is through your personal example.

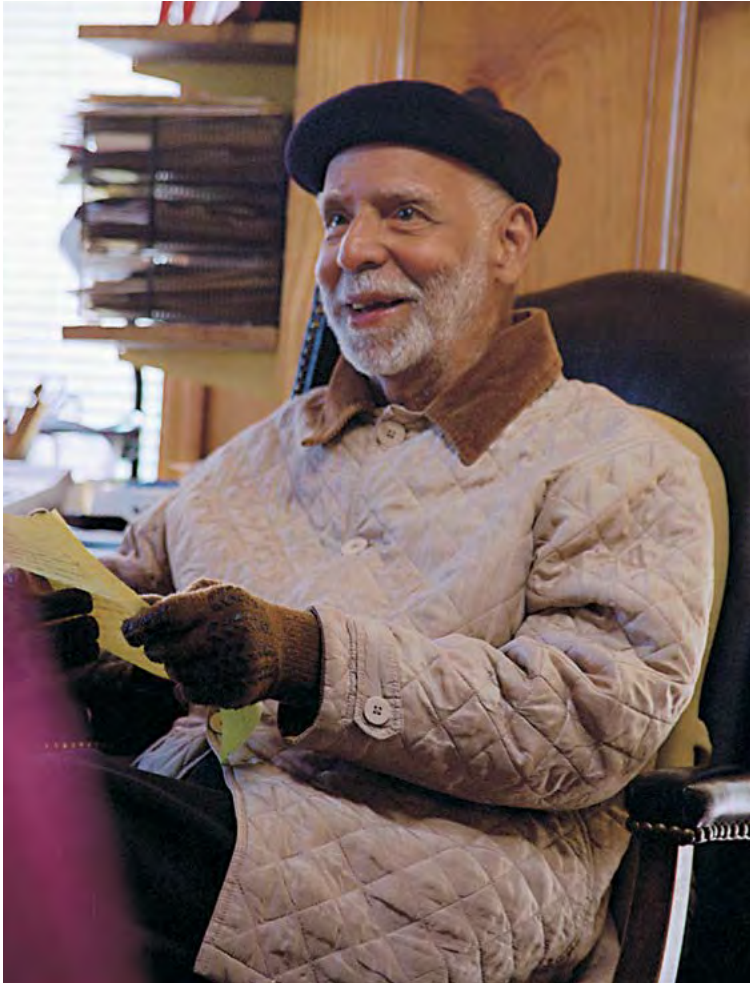
Harmony with the environment – the alleviation of our environmental crisis – and harmony with others – the easing of our social, political, and economic difficulties – both begin with a third harmony: harmony with ourselves.

## Helping all around you

Even though they may not realize it consciously, people absorb something deep below the conscious level when they see a man who is at peace with himself, a woman who finds her happiness in making life a little better for the community. It is the same mental dynamic as advertisers use in their roadside billboards. While you are traveling on the freeway, you may not notice the billboards consciously, but a certain part of their message seeps into the unconscious, and influences you the next time you go to the store.

Similarly, when you are able to live with joy, giving your time and energy to improving the quality of life for all, you are not only fulfilling your highest destiny, you are also helping all those around you to grow to their full height. This is not an easy path. Self-transformation is arduous, especially at first; but each tiny change brings with it the joyful awareness that your life is gradually becoming a force for peaceful change.





Easwaran, 1990s.

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## A sustainable way of life

Nothing is more important today. Much effort is going into the search for substitutes for environmentally harmful products, like the chlorofluorocarbons which damage the ozone layer or the chemicals which pollute our groundwater, but what we need just as urgently is a substitute for the real culprit – a way of life which demands ever-increasing amounts of material resources while providing ever-decreasing satisfaction.

To replace it, we need more than just a plan for efficient energy use or designs for solar-powered cars, although these are always welcome. We need a way of life which gives back more than it takes, enhancing the world around us rather than exploiting and polluting it.

So, while the chemists search for substitutes for CFCs and the engineers seek to make solar and wind power profitable, the environmental crisis is challenging us all to undertake an even more important search: the search for a sustainable, fully satisfying way of life, based not on exploiting the external environment, but on taking full advantage of the riches inside us – the nobility, compassion, and desire for peace that lie hidden in every heart. This is not work that can be done for us by corporations or governments; we each have to do it ourselves.

## Work together in harmony

Yet we do not have to do it alone. My grandmother, who was my spiritual teacher, always used the tamarind tree to illustrate the power of ordinary people. The tamarind is a big tree, with very small, thin leaves. On a hot day, the people of my old state of Kerala like to sleep in its shade. The leaves are so numerous and are packed so close together that they protect us from the tropical sun just as if they were one large canopy.

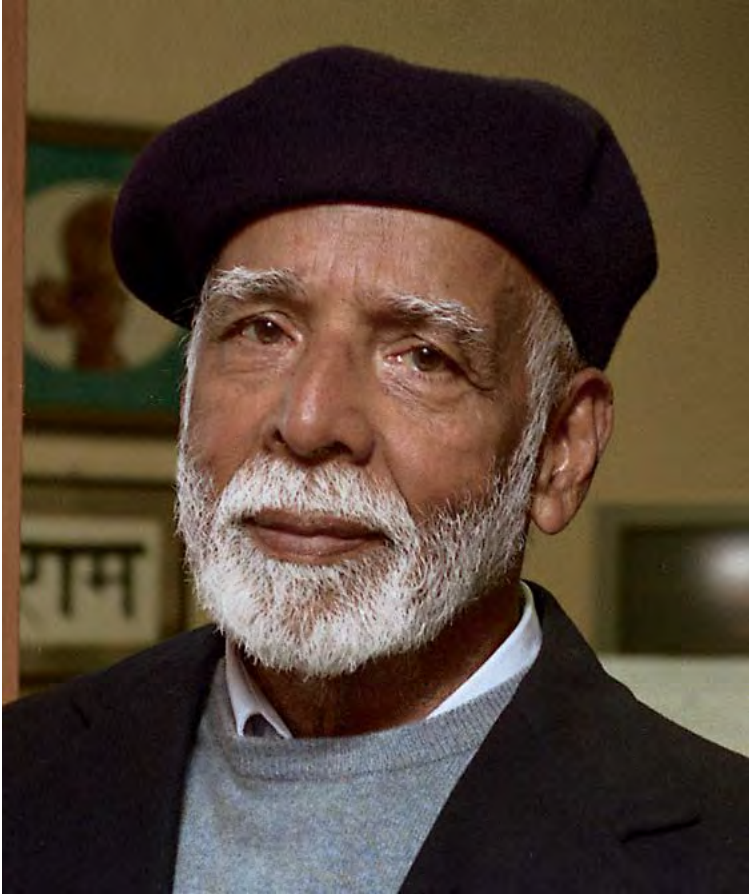
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“Little Lamp, you don’t have to look for big people,” Granny would tell me. “Look for little people like yourself, then band together and work together in harmony.”

So don’t be intimidated by position or power or wealth. If little people like you and me work together, we can do a great deal to transform the world. 🌸



BMCM staff coming back from a project on the access road.



Easwaran, 1990s.

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# Remaking Our World

Eknath Easwaran

Ultimately, in every one of the crises we are facing, the solution depends upon you and me.

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.

In this great task, no one is unemployed. The Gita would say that all of us are given a job the moment we are born: our job is to give. Give till it hurts – and then give more. When it hurts more, give more.

Without the compassion, awareness, and wisdom hidden in each of our hearts, the world simply may not survive.

The time has come when one by one we must learn to light the lamp of freedom and compassion within. Slowly, but very surely, the night will be filled with glowing lamps. There is no one else to do this job for us, and there may as yet be only a few of us who are ready to do it.

But, as Emerson put it, “when it is dark enough you can see the stars.”

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Eknath Easwaran". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the main text of the article.

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# Meditation Retreats

We are in an unprecedented time of challenge in our world. Here at the BMCM we are taking very much to heart Easwaran's call to pour ourselves into our passage meditation practice, so that we can be a source of service, light, and love in our families and communities.

In our retreats this year, we will train ourselves to take our practice as deep as we can and to turn directly to Easwaran's books and talks for his inspiration and help. We hope you will join us in person or online!

## **Introductory Weekend Retreats:**

March 6–8, June 12–14

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

April 17–19, August 7–9

## **Returnee Weekend Retreats:**

May 15–17, August 28–30

## **Weeklong Retreats:**

March 28–April 3, May 2–8,  
July 11–17 (Affiliates & Cohorts),  
August 15–21, September 12–18

## **Family Weekend:**

August 1–2

## **Senior Half-Week Retreats:**

March 13–17, June 19–23

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# Online Programs

## Introductory Webinars:

May 16

## Returnee Online Workshops:

February 22, November 21

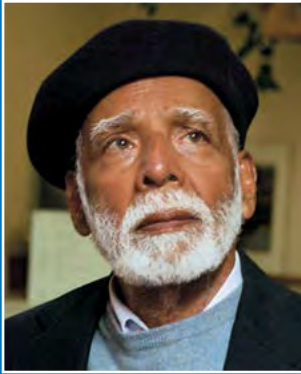
## Learning and Using the Eight Points – Online Course:

October 10–November 20 (6 weeks)

We offer a sliding scale and scholarships for all our programs. Some online programs are free of charge.

[www.bmcm.org/programs](http://www.bmcm.org/programs) • 800.475.2369





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— *Eknath Easwaran*



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