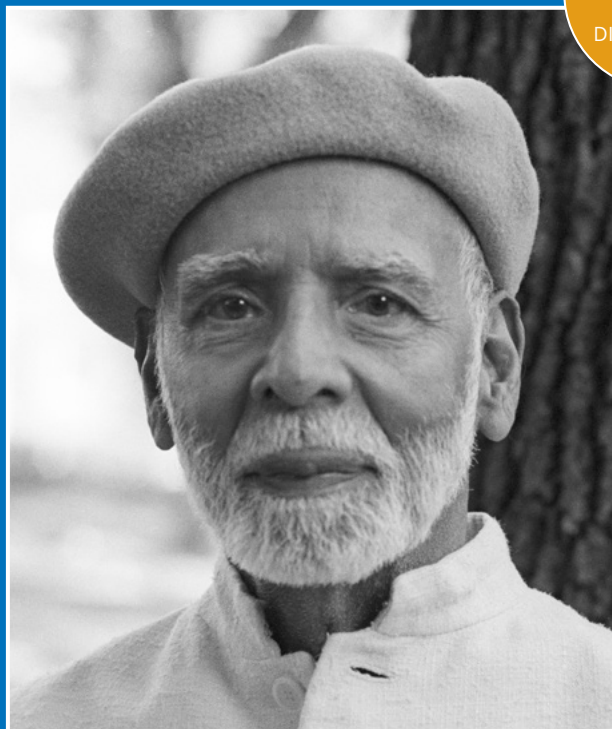


Ekknath Easwaran on Meditation & Spiritual Living

# Blue Mountain Journal

SPRING / SUMMER 2020

SPECIAL  
ISSUE  
DIGITAL ONLY



Wisdom and  
Compassion in a  
Global Crisis

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## In This Issue

“Every one of us,” Easwaran writes, “has capacities inside us that we have never dreamed of, which we can learn to draw on in our daily lives.” Today, with much of the world disrupted by a global pandemic, with our plans and routines upended and the future uncertain, we need these resources more than ever.

In this special digital-only issue of our journal, Easwaran reminds us how to access them. When we steady the mind, he observes in the first article, we find our center of strength within, enabling us to weather life’s storms and stress with grace.

In a second article, Easwaran describes two paths: an upward path leading to fulfillment and a downward path leading to sorrow. By taking the upward path, forgetting ourselves in living for the welfare of all, we create a better, richer, more secure life, not just for us but for everyone.

This issue also includes “Nine Tips for a Crisis” from Easwaran and stories from the BMCM community on applying his eight-point program during this difficult time, whether you are staying at home or working on the front lines.

We hope this journal inspires you to strengthen your spiritual practice and deepen your connection to all.

— The BMCM Editorial Team

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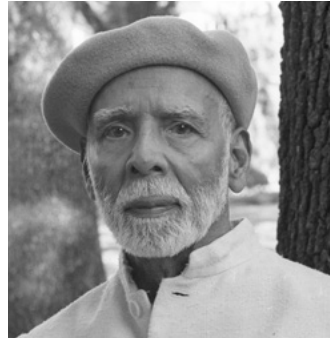
## From Easwaran

I keep in close touch with what happens in the world. And there are times when I feel deeply grieved by the suffering I read about, and I wonder why life has to be this way.

But I never despair. At those times I go deep, deep into meditation until I reach the very source of love and wisdom that exists in each of us. When I do, I am reassured that all is well.

This is not merely some sentimental notion. I return from this awareness charged with the energy and vision I need to continue to alleviate this suffering.

So what I would tell all of you is this: meditate every day, throw yourself into some form of selfless work, and use your sense of suffering as a powerful motivation to help relieve the suffering of others. It is a wonderful gift to give.

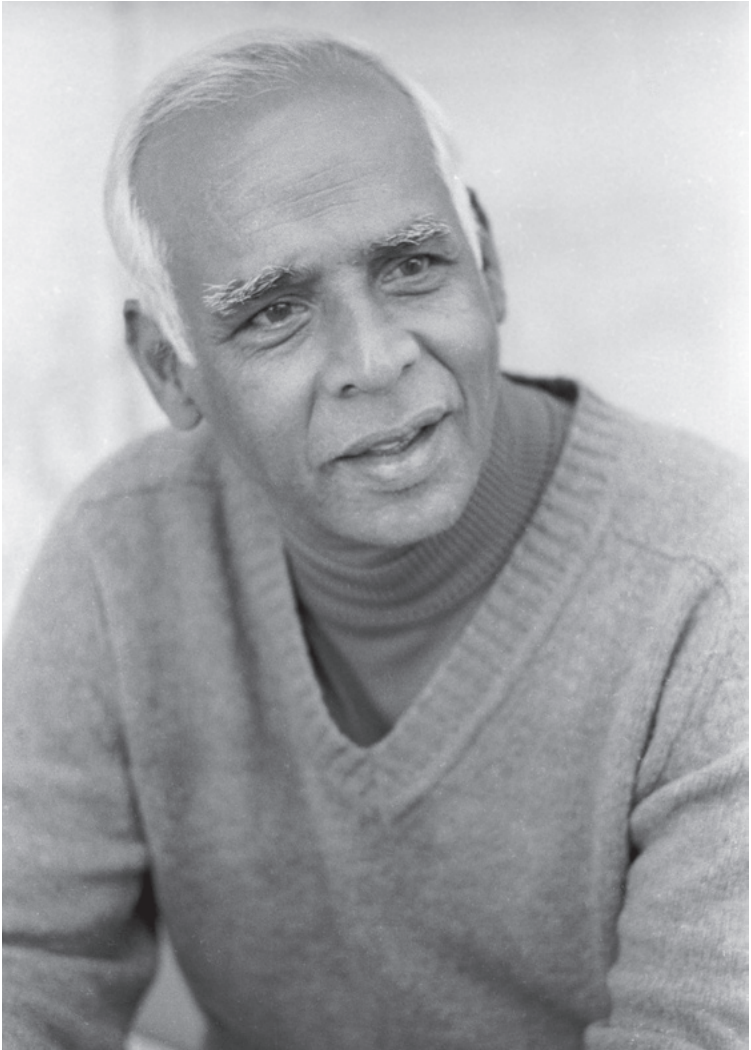


A handwritten signature in cursive script, which reads "Eknath Easwaran". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

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Easwaran, early 1970s.

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# Strength in the Storm

by Eknath Easwaran

My first encounter with an ocean storm came on my way to the U.S. on the Fulbright exchange program. I sailed from Bombay on an ancient P&O liner that had been in service before the first world war. There were no luxuries, but I enjoyed the trip because of the variety of passengers – from empire builders to scholars from the Far East – and the ever-changing beauty of the sea.

But July in the Arabian Sea is monsoon season, and three or four days out our little ship began to be tossed like a toy by winds and rain.

A storm is a great equalizer. All distinctions of class and color were swept away. Empire builders hung at the railings side by side with Asian academics, clutching identical brown bags. All of us cheered with relief when the weather passed and we were obliged to put in at Aden for repairs.

Sailing from Cherbourg to New York on HMS *Queen Mary* was an utterly different experience. The *Queen Mary* too was nearing retirement age. But she was fast, and positively luxurious by comparison with that P&O vessel. When we hit rough seas on the Atlantic, we sailed through majestically without a roll.

“Why aren’t we being tossed about?” I asked an officer. “Is it because of the ship’s size?”

“No,” he said proudly, “it’s the stabilizers. We installed them a couple of years ago. Now rough waters don’t bother her at all.”

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## Steadiness of mind

I often recall those two journeys to illustrate one of the most important truths I have ever learned. Like a storm, life is a great equalizer. It does bring sunny days, but it is sure to bring storms as well. And regardless of class, color, status, birth, or wealth, some of us sail through surely while others flounder and even go under.

Few human beings are born with the skill to weather storms and stress with grace. Yet everyone can learn. We can't control the weather outside, but we can control how we respond. Like the *Queen Mary*, we can install stabilizers – in the mind.

For it is in the mind that the storms of life really blow. What matters is not so much the turmoil outside us as the weather within. To a person with an agitated mind, something as minor as a rude driver can cause enough stress to ruin a day.

By contrast I think of Mahatma Gandhi, who gave himself away when he confessed, “I love storms.” Gandhi began life as a timid child, but he learned to keep his mind so steady that he could face tremendous crises with courage, compassion, wisdom, and even a sense of humor.

This steadiness of mind is one of the most practical of skills. Without it, no one can face the challenges of life without breaking. And life today is challenging to say the least.

## The power of the mantram

Fortunately, we don't have to develop these capacities. We already have them. But we need a calm mind to draw on them. When the mind is agitated or confused, the deeper resources we require are simply locked up inside. That is the practical importance of a calm mind.

So how do we calm the mind? One very powerful way is so

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simple that everyone can learn it easily, right now, even a child: the repetition of a mantram, or “prayer word” as it is called in some circles in the West.

You can think of the mantram as a handrail for the mind. It gives you something to hold on to, so that you can steady yourself in confusing circumstances until your thoughts become clear.

You can draw on the power of the mantram like this at any time, wherever you happen to be, whatever you happen to be doing. But if you want the mantram to come to your rescue when you need it, if you want it to steady your mind in times of turmoil, you need to practice, practice, practice in calm weather.

Constant repetition drives the mantram deep into consciousness, where it can anchor your mind so surely that no amount of agitation can sweep you away.

I must have given this advice a million times, but it can never be repeated too often. Throughout my life, no matter how assiduously I practiced this skill, I have always been able to find more time, additional opportunities to put it to use. This is how we can gradually extend sovereignty over the mind.

## **There when I needed help**

This protective influence can even extend to the body, as I can illustrate with another story from that stormy ocean voyage.

From my first day on board that P&O liner, I acquired a reputation as a very odd bird. For one thing, I had to have my meditation every morning – and since my little cabin was cramped and airless, I chose to huddle in a blanket up on the sports deck, which was quite deserted at dawn. That alone secured the amused attention of some young Australians,



Easwaran, 1960s.

whose boredom found relief in making cracks at my expense.

Then, after my meditation, I would take a long, fast walk repeating my mantram to myself – a habit I must have picked up from Mahatma Gandhi's example many years earlier. Of course, a long, fast walk on a relatively small liner means going around and around and around . . . at the pace of an Olympic walker. More opportunities for amusement for my fellow passengers, who much preferred their deck chairs. After a few days of this, my reputation was assured.

Then the storm struck – and when the view started gyrating wildly between sky and sea, my stomach began to behave the same way. I made it through the first day, but the next morning I awoke with the sinking sensation that my time had come. My first impulse was to grab a brown bag and join the others draped miserably over the rails.



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But my mantram had awakened too – *Rama, Rama, Rama* – without any conscious prompting. After all those years of practice, it knew when I needed help.

Clinging to the mantram as tightly as to the handrail, I managed to reach the sports deck without incident and sat down for meditation. For a while it was touch and go. But then my mind settled down, and I got absorbed in what mystics call the sea of peace within.

### A precious clue

When I finished and opened my eyes, my stomach had stopped complaining. It had calmed down along with my mind. I felt on top of the world. With the ship still pitching wildly, I sauntered as best I could into the dining room and sat down to a first-rate breakfast – in solitary dignity, monarch of all I surveyed.

The purser looked on in awe. When I rose to go, he approached with new respect and asked in a conspirator’s whisper, “What tablets do you use?”

I wanted to tell him, “It’s not the stomach that needs to be settled. It’s the mind.”

As far as the mind is concerned, the cause of stress is not particularly important. What matters are the waves of agitation in the mind. Whether we feel anxious, panicky, angry, afraid, or simply out of control, the mind is doing the same thing: heaving up and down like the sea.

This is a precious clue. It means that we don’t have to prepare for one kind of crisis in this way and another in that way. All we have to do is learn to steady the mind.

We learn this with little challenges – the thousand and one daily irritations that upset us even when we know they aren’t worth getting upset over.

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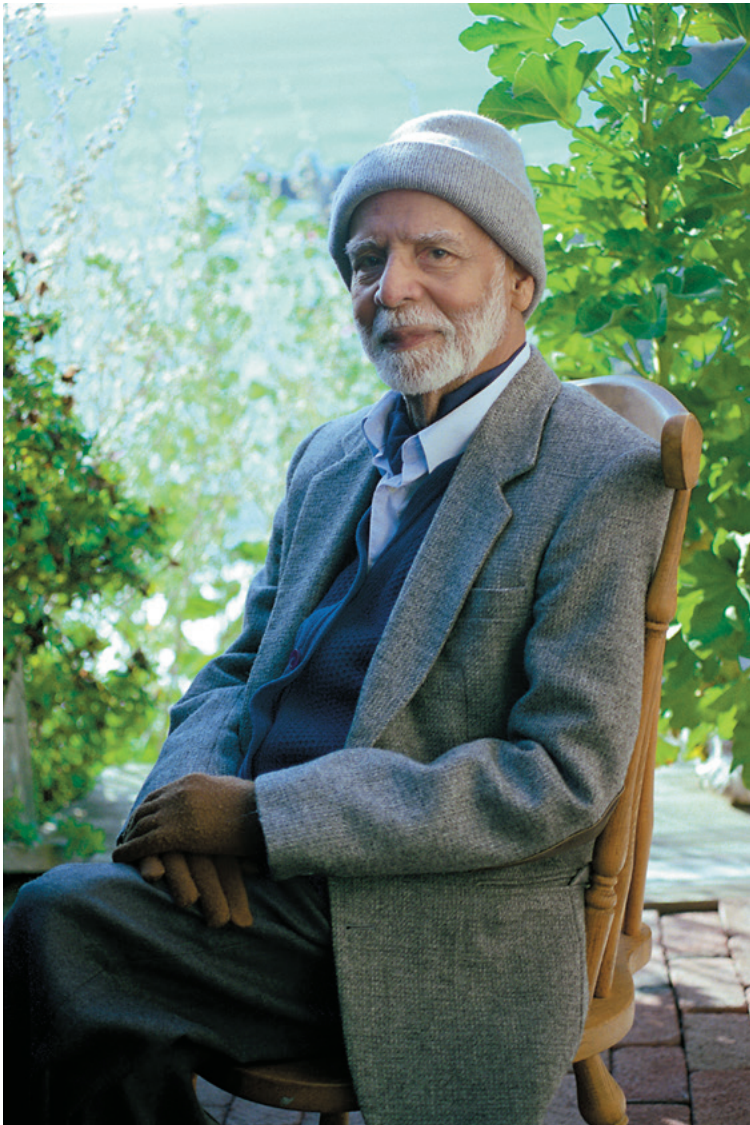
Whenever someone cuts in front of you in traffic, repeat the mantram and don't react. Whenever someone contradicts you, repeat your mantram and hold your tongue. Life graciously provides us with innumerable little incidents like this, which instead of irritants can become opportunities for gaining strength. If you go on taking advantage of them as they arise, you can gradually raise your threshold of upsettability higher and higher, until hassles take one look and run away.

### **A center of strength within**

Of course, there is much more to life than “small stuff.” Coping with hassles is just training. The Olympic challenges are the crises and tragedies – accidents, illness, separation, betrayal, bereavement – that are bound to come to all of us in one form or other without warning. That is when we need to know how to find strength within ourselves, for that is just when external supports are likely to fail.

If I may offer my own small example, I have been struck by very severe blows in the course of my life. But it is from those trials that I learned to go deep inside myself for strength and consolation. It was a storm of personal tragedies that caused me to turn inward and learn to meditate. This is the real lesson to learn from crisis: not to rely on any external support, but to find your center of strength within.

“Emergencies and crises,” the psychologist William James observed, “show us how much greater our vital resources are than we had supposed.” This is the opportunity that crisis and challenge offer us. Every one of us has capacities inside us that we have never even dreamed of, which we can learn to draw on in our daily lives. That is our legacy as human beings. 🌸



Easwaran, 1990s.

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# Nine Tips for a Crisis

by Eknath Easwaran

## 1. Repeat the mantram

When you are afraid, repeat the mantram; it has the power to change fear into fearlessness. For people who claim that fear is not a problem for them, I simply ask if they have any worries. The usual answer is, “More than I can count.” Worries are simply little fears; put a hundred worries together and you have one big fear. When your vitality leaks out through a hundred little worries, it is no wonder that you feel inadequate to the challenges of the day. So repeat the mantram when you are worried, and it will change worry into confidence.

When you are sick or suffering any physical discomfort, the mantram is of great value. As more attention goes to the mantram, there is less attention for the physical sensations of discomfort or pain.

If you are really ill, instead of lying in bed watching television or solving crossword puzzles or just staring at the cracks in the ceiling, you can put this time to much better use by repeating the mantram. It will not only comfort you and take your mind off the pain; it can release curative forces from deep within.

There is nothing occult about this. A good deal of the suffering involved in illness comes from dwelling on the symptoms, from worrying about how serious the illness is and when you will recover and how you will manage to carry on. This anxiety impedes your recovery, and you can use the mantram to keep such worries from clouding your mind.

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## 2. Stay slowed down

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. That is simply the dynamics of the mind.

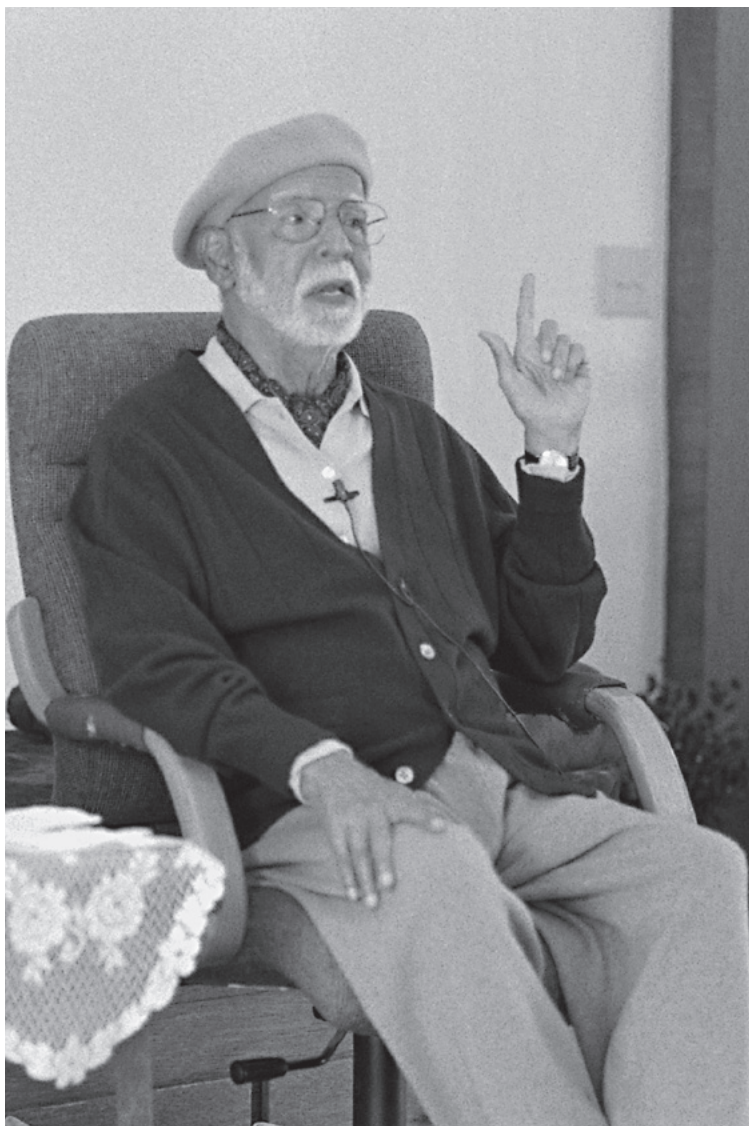
People who don't easily get provoked, even when there is cause for provocation, don't "fly off the handle." It's difficult to upset them, difficult to speed up their minds. They can stay calm in the midst of pressure, remain sensitive to the needs of all involved, see clearly, and act decisively.

During a crisis – from a minor emergency at the office to a major earthquake – such people help everyone else to stay clearheaded. They are protecting not only themselves from danger, but those around them too.

## 3. Spread compassion

As a boy, when I was feeling sorry for myself because of difficulties in school or with someone in the village, my grandmother used to tell me gently, "This is not sorrow; this is self-pity. Self-pity weakens, but sorrow for others strengthens and ennobles human nature."

This is a distinction worth remembering, particularly in times of distress. Whenever we feel life has been hard on us, instead of going off to our bedroom and locking the door, that is the ideal time for turning our grief outward and putting it to work as compassion for the sorrows of others. After all, everyone faces misfortunes in life – now and again, severe ones.



Easwaran, 1990s.

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If, in the midst of our own troubles, we can go to a grieving neighbor or to someone sick and offer help, we will find that while we are lifting their spirits, we are lifting our own as well. This is a perfect recipe both for nipping depression in the bud and for spreading consolation.

#### 4. Remember your overriding goal

Every one of us has an aching need for a goal worthy of our complete dedication, for an ideal so lofty that we can keep our eyes on it no matter what circumstances come our way.

Much of our boredom and restlessness comes from not having a direction in life; we are like someone all dressed up on a Saturday night with nowhere to go. If I may say so, most of what we call goals are not real goals at all, because they give us no all-encompassing sense of purpose in life.

But when we have an overriding goal, we find that many of our problems fall away of their own accord. Everything falls into perspective: we know what to do with our time, what to do with our energy, and it is easier to see all the little choices that confront us every day.

Shall I eat what appeals to the taste buds, or what conduces to sound health? Shall I spend time doing my own thing, or doing work which benefits all those around me? Shall I move away from people just because their ways are not my ways, or shall I try to live in harmony with everyone around me?

When we have our eyes on the goal of life we see these choices everywhere, all the time, and we begin to cultivate the will and wisdom to make the choices which will help us to grow to our full stature. Thus we gradually wake up to our true nature, which is ever pure, ever perfect.

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## 5. Train attention to be there when you need it

A wandering mind gets bored easily, so it likes to combine a task like brushing teeth with reading the *Wall Street Journal* or listening to a lesson on learning Italian. “Why waste time on your teeth?” the mind wants to know. “Why not do something interesting at the same time?”

Actually, it is doing two things at once that truly wastes time. All we are doing in such cases is teaching the mind to do whatever it chooses.

The problem with this is not found in moments of dental hygiene. It is discovered in times of crisis, when we can't stop thinking about something painful or oppressive no matter how much we desire to. Just when we most need some control over our attention, we are helpless.

Years ago, in San Francisco, Christine and I saw Rodin's statue *The Thinker*. A tourist next to us asked the inevitable question: “I wonder what he's thinking about.”

I wanted to say, “I know. He's thinking, ‘How can I stop thinking?’”

Most of us have asked that question when the turmoil of the mind won't let us rest. At such times, we'd give anything to shut down the frantic thought-factory in our heads for just one healing hour. It took years for me to learn the simple answer: to train attention at every opportunity, even in little things, so the capacity is there when we need it.



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## 6. Be detached in your work

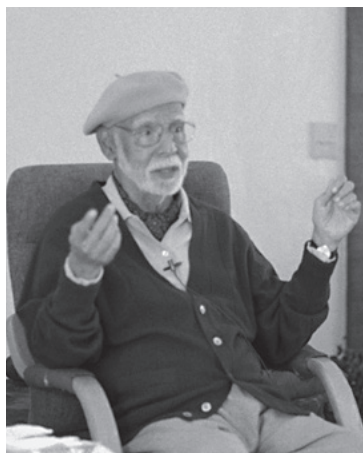
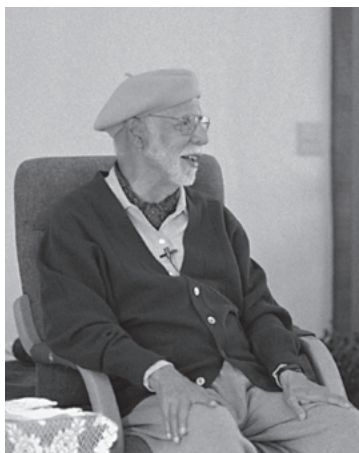
Detachment from our emotions is important even to survive in today's world of stress, but it is essential for anyone who wants to try to do some good in the world. Only a detached person can jump into a crisis and help; an attached person just gets sucked in.

When we have learned to drop attachment to getting what we want while working hard and selflessly for a great cause, we can work without anxiety, with confidence and peace of mind. Reverses will come, but they will only drive us deeper into our consciousness.

We like to think that we make big decisions and carry terrible responsibilities on our shoulders. Our shoulders are bent, our back gives us problems, and we are too tired to stand on our feet because of the weighty burdens we try to bear. Few of us realize there is somebody standing with arms outstretched, just waiting to carry our burdens for us.

In Kerala, the state in South India from which I come, there are stone parapets along the roadside the height of a man's head. When people need to rest from carrying heavy loads of rice or fruit on their heads, they stand next to the parapet and shift their load onto it. For us the Lord is the perennial parapet, standing at exactly the right height for each one of us. For those of us who are very selfish, he stands very tall to support an awesome load; for those of us who are average in selfishness, he stands about six feet high; and for the selfless, the parapet can hardly be seen because the burden is so light that almost no support is needed.

Through the practice of meditation, we can gradually learn to shift our load into the Lord's mighty arms. By developing this blessed capacity, we will be able to face the greatest of challenges, terrifying even to national leaders, with ease and equanimity.



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## 7. Be careful with the media

Nutritionists remind us that before we eat something, we should ask, “Do I want this to be part of my body?” Similarly, we should remind ourselves every time we go out for entertainment or switch on the TV, “This experience is going to become part of me. Will I be better for it? Will it leave me calmer, or will it agitate me? Will it make me more compassionate, or will it stir up anger or leave me depressed?”

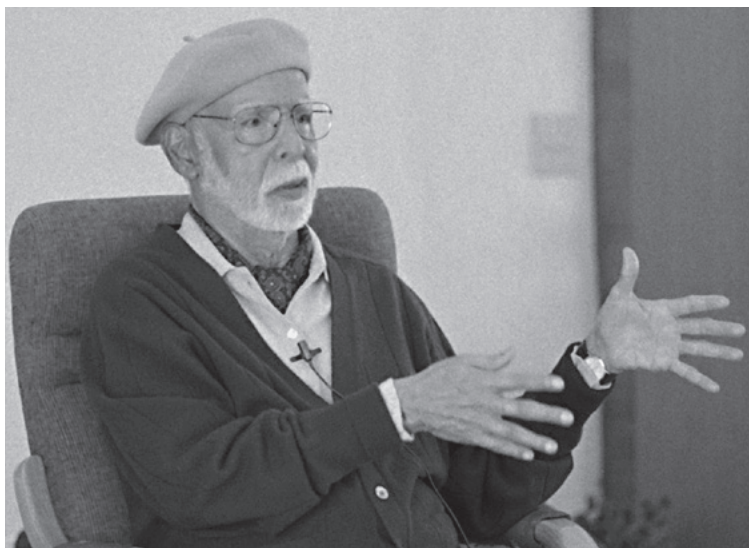
In other words, I am talking about reclaiming the power to choose what goes into your mind. After all, don't you like to choose the food you eat? It is the same with what you feed your mind.

## 8. Give your best in relationships

When you practice detachment continuously – at home, at work, among friends, and especially with difficult people – you will find how much security it brings you in your relationships. A spiritually detached person, which to me means a very loving person, will never allow relationships to degenerate to stimulus and response.

The test is simple: even if you are angry with me, can I stay calm and loving with you and help you overcome your anger? If you persist in disliking me, can I continue to like you? For it is when you dislike me that I have all the more reason to be loyal to you, to show you what loyalty really means.

After all, when your partner is being especially nice to you, it's easy to be pleasant in return. It is when she goes out of her way to offend you that you should not walk out. That is just the time to sit by her side and for every unkind word she utters, as Jesus says, give her seven words that are kind. For every shove she gives you, try to move that much closer.



I am the first to admit that it takes a lot of endurance to mend a relationship, especially when your efforts seem to be met with indifference. When you start giving another person your best, especially in an emotionally entangled relationship, he may not notice it for weeks. This kind of indifference can really sting. You want to go up to him, tap him on the shoulder, and say, “Hello, Thomas, I’ve just been kind to you.” Thomas would say, “Oh, thank you, I didn’t even know it” – not because he was trying to be rude, but because he was preoccupied with himself.

To be patient and go on giving your best, you can’t have expectations about how other people are going to respond. You can’t afford to ask, “Does he like me? Does he even care?” What does it matter? You’re growing. You’re learning how to rub off the edges and corners that make human relationships difficult. You are becoming the kind of person that everyone wants to be with, that everyone admires and feels comfortable with.

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## 9. Dive deep in meditation

In meditation you can go into a vast treasure-house inside. You have a kind of latchkey: you can go in anytime and draw out as much as you like. The manager, the Lord, sits there behind his big desk and says, “Go in and help yourself. Stuff your pockets. Only make sure you go back and use it all for others.”

That is the agreement, which he has got in writing, so to say, sealed with your very life. Thus meditation works miracles: it recharges your enthusiasm and restores a robust optimism for life. It is the supreme education.

Living on the surface of life as we do, we don't suspect what a treasure trove of love and wisdom we have within. If I knew of a simple, painless way of unlocking this treasure, I would be the first to give it. But as far as I know, there is no way to enter and make use of these untold riches except by practicing meditation and integrating its allied disciplines into our daily life. There is no shortcut around the travail of this journey into consciousness, and those who have traversed it testify that it is the ultimate test of human endurance.

Yet this is the very challenge that appeals to people. It banishes boredom and brings the dew of freshness to every day. There can be no failure in this effort: for as you go deeper and deeper into your consciousness, you discover that you have vast resources of which you never dreamed: resources with which to help yourself, to help your family and community, to contribute to your society, to change the very world for the better.

The unending miracle of these resources is that they are there within every one of us. We have only to dive deep to discover them. 🌸

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## COMMUNITY STORY

### **A shift in the mind**

It's been now about six weeks of sheltering-in-place and relative isolation. Yet I've had daily contemplative and appreciative time in the early spring outdoors including mantram walks, with no pressing agenda to be back at a certain time and opportunities merely to smile or wave occasionally at neighbors.

Gradually I've observed a shift in the mind. With increased focus on Slowing Down and One-Pointed Attention, and in part due to less unnecessary interaction with others, I have sensed a marked decrease in the inner dialogue. I've tried to welcome this state with curiosity.

### **Baggage could be jettisoned**

At first of course when the realization gradually dawned that unprecedented times were upon us, I had quickly to scan externally to make sure I was minimizing the risks of becoming sick, that I was safe at home and had access to food, necessities and communication with a small circle of friends and family I am closest with, checking to see if they too were secure. The mantram got quite a workout in those first few days.

But then the days began to blur into each other. The mind exited from the familiar freeway to the side roads and then to the country lanes. Baggage could be jettisoned, first noticed as the letting go of to-do lists, lifelong habits that

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were now moot or tasks which could be stretched out over a longer time, perhaps allowing samskaras to be gently unmasked.

With time to go deeper, I've noticed that with less in-person interaction, and lately less phone and online interaction, much of my previous inner dialogue was dominated by anticipating discussion, debate, formulating questions/positions, analyzing past interactions, judging motivations, and even preparing "self-defense."

### **A slower mode**

Indeed this period has aspects of a laboratory showing how Slowing Down helps let go of self, attachment to opinions, self-will and the churning of old narratives. I'm making an intention to hold the space for the benefits of this slower mode when social life becomes more active, in turn creating more space for Putting Others First.

The resonance of this passage from Saint Augustine, "Entering into Joy," is no great surprise:

Imagine if all the tumult of the body were to quiet down,  
Along with all our busy thoughts about earth, sea and air;  
If the very world should stop, and the mind cease  
thinking about Itself, go beyond itself and be quite still . . . .

– Tom, passage meditator, Ohio

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## Entering into Joy

*Saint Augustine*

Imagine if all the tumult of the body were to quiet down, along with all our busy thoughts about earth, sea, and air; if the very world should stop, and the mind cease thinking about itself, go beyond itself, and be quite still;

if all the fantasies that appear in dreams and imagination should cease, and there be no speech, no sign:

Imagine if all things that are perishable grew still – for if we listen they are saying, *We did not make ourselves; he made us who abides forever* – imagine, then, that they should say this and fall silent, listening to the very voice of him who made them and not to that of his creation;

so that we should hear not his word through the tongues of men, nor the voice of angels, nor the clouds' thunder, nor any symbol, but the very Self which in these things we love, and go beyond ourselves to attain a flash of that eternal wisdom which abides above all things:

And imagine if that moment were to go on and on, leaving behind all other sights and sounds but this one vision which ravishes and absorbs and fixes the beholder in joy; so that the rest of eternal life were like that moment of illumination which leaves us breathless:

Would this not be what is bidden in scripture,  
*Enter thou into the joy of thy lord?*





Spring at Ramagiri Ashram.



Christine Easwaran by the rock in the memorial garden at Ramagiri Ashram.



Shanti, the meditation hall at Ramagiri Ashram.



Easwaran, 1970s.

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## Two Paths

by Eknath Easwaran

One morning the paper brought me an interesting surprise. Facing each other on opposite pages were perfect illustrations of the two paths a human being can take in life: an upward path that leads to fulfillment, a downward path that leads to sorrow.

Nowhere are these paths delineated more clearly than in India's best-known scripture, the Bhagavad Gita – what Mahatma Gandhi called his spiritual reference book. The Gita is not a book of commandments but a book of choices. It says to each of us, “Here are two ways of living. If you live for your own narrow pleasure and profit, that very way of life will eventually make you lonely, bitter, and unfulfilled. If you forget yourself in living for the welfare of all, in which your own welfare is included, you will be secure, loving, and loved.” The choice is left to us. Everyone responds to this approach, for it gives us freedom and responsibility.

On the left-hand page was an interview with a man full of advice on how to make the best of the economic, social, and ecological disaster that according to him is sure to come. From the opening sentence, I knew what path he represented and where it had to lead. Because of its very premise – how to get, not how to give – the path he has chosen cannot lead anywhere but down. It is not a question of whether the man himself is good or bad. He offers his advice with good intentions. But once you accept the idea that what is most important is to look out for yourself, the rest follows so naturally that we scarcely notice where it is taking us.

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## The capacity to choose

This expert looks at the clouds on the horizon and observes, “Pretty bad. We’re on the edge of disaster.” I agree – except that I would say we are not on the edge; we are *in* the disaster right now. “But,” he continues, “things are going to get a lot worse. The end is near.” There I disagree. True, if we go on the way we have been going, the end may very well be near. But he has forgotten that human beings have the precious capacity to choose, even to the point of changing direction completely.

When we forget this, we behave as if trends in history were rigid. Trends are made up of people like you and me, who are free to choose. If the end is near, we can make it recede. If enough of us draw on our deeper resources, make the right choices, the *beginning* is near – the beginning of a better, richer, more secure life, not just for us as individuals but for everyone.

## The path of self-preservation

This man is warning us that the lifestyle so many take for granted in the developed countries is about to come to an abrupt end. It simply isn’t sustainable. Most people will be taken by surprise when the bubble bursts, he warns, but we can maintain a reasonable amount of comfort for ourselves by following some simple steps.

He summarizes his message in what he calls the “three Gs” of self-preservation. The first of these is pretty basic: groceries. He forecasts severe food shortages in the near future as global food systems break down. He does not enter into social criticism; he simply says, “This is what is going to happen.” And his natural conclusion is “Buy up as much food as you can, at least a year’s supply, and store it in your attic or cellar.”

At first, this sounds eminently reasonable. It’s only common

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sense to be prepared for an emergency as best one can. But as I read on, I realized that this man isn't simply talking about disaster preparedness. He is trying to hang on to a way of life that he himself calls unsustainable – in effect, by moving a large number of food items from the chain stores to his garage.

### **A more appealing solution**

What about the alternatives? After all, most of us eat more than we really need – some of us to the point of jeopardizing our health. And we tend to eat too much of the wrong foods as well. Rather than wait till we are forced to abandon an excessive way of living, why not start eating only what we need of foods that don't simply taste good but are good for the body? Not only would the health of the nation improve; we ourselves would feel better and enjoy life more.

Second, I would say, instead of going to the supermarket and stocking up on cans and packages of the same old stuff, why not start to cultivate local food sources? We can even grow some of our own food. It sounds impractical, but many people are learning to do this even in big cities – on rooftops, in small yards, and all sorts of other ingenious places – and I am told that this kind of hand cultivation raises more food per square foot of earth than any of the big commercial growers.

To me this is a most appealing solution. Instead of subtracting from the food supply, this adds to it. Instead of worsening the problem for others, this eases it. And there are many side benefits: the food tastes better, the family gets a chance to work together, children can participate, friends and neighbors can build communities by sharing plots of land, tools, labor, and experience.

Of course, this man reminds us, besides food, we need

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to hoard other necessities – everything we don't want to do without, from automobile parts to deodorant. This too may sound reasonable. If you believe, for example, that life is not worth living unless you can drive hundreds of miles at the drop of a three-day holiday, you may well want to stockpile a modest assortment of spark plugs, oil filters, headlights, tires, fan belts, and fuses in addition to all that food. It might even be a good idea to buy a second vehicle from a junkyard and save it for spare parts. That garage is beginning to fill up . . .

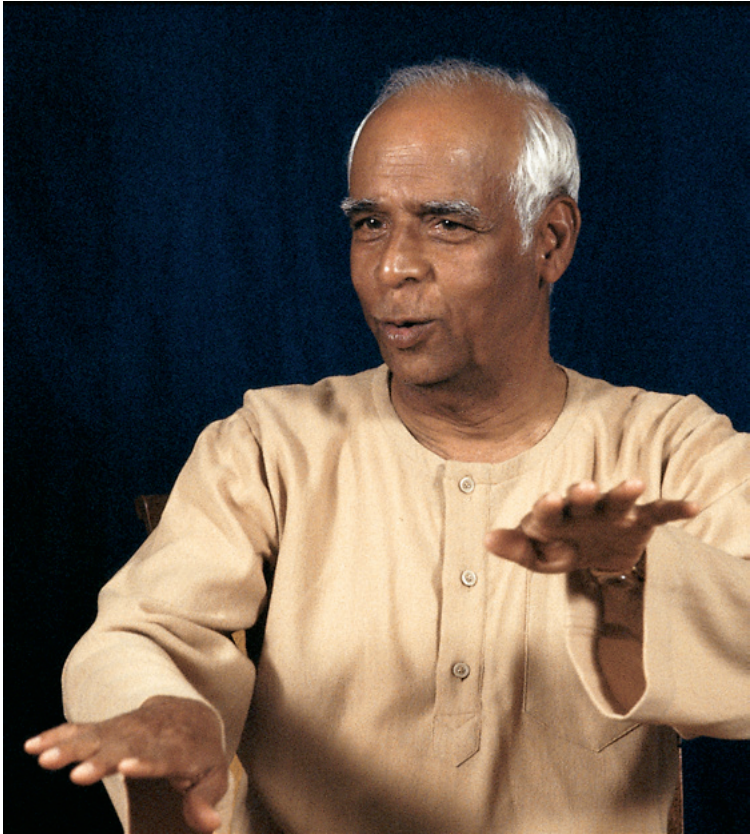
### **An opportunity, not an ordeal**

But on the other hand, it might not be the end of the world to be frugal about how much we drive. Instead of an ordeal, it could be an opportunity. You don't have to go to Disney World to enjoy yourself. Why not stay home? Enjoy your family; perhaps they haven't seen much of you. Play with your children. Take them to the park or to the beach – and take the dogs too. If you haven't got a dog, you can always borrow a neighbor's. When I go to the beach, I take as many friends and dogs as the car will hold. According to the tags on their collars, none of these dogs belongs to me. But in my eyes all of them are mine, just as every child is our own.

And why worry if the beach is not Nice or Acapulco? True, the signs may be readable; the policemen may be less than exotic. But I can assure you, it's the very same beach. The sand is the same, the sun is the same, and the sunburn you get is the same too.

After all, it wasn't that long ago that people managed to entertain themselves quite adequately without relying on automobiles. If we have forgotten how to do this, it is we who lose, by making ourselves dependent on a wasteful way of life.





Easwaran, 1970s.

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## Focus on what matters

A shortage of consumer goods need not be a crisis. It can help us focus on what matters. For decades we have been bombarded with propaganda to buy, buy, buy. The question of need is irrelevant. If you don't need more, why should that keep you from buying more? You can always get something expensive for someone else. Spend money to show your love. If you don't buy, you don't love.

Any sensible person hearing this should object, "Where is the connection?" If you want to show your love, give your time, your attention, your sensitivity.

Give what is useful, I would say, but do not give impediments. More is not better – in fact, it is often worse. Many years ago, when I gave a talk on meditation at a retreat center in New Mexico, Christine and I were invited to stay at the home of a well-known celebrity. We brought only one small suitcase, yet when we opened the cavernous closet in our room, I couldn't see how we were going to fit in so much as a shirt. Our hostess must have had a dress for every day of the season in that closet, and at least a hundred pairs of shoes. And that was the guest room! When I heard she was interested in spirituality but didn't have time to meditate, I wanted to say, "I'm not surprised. It must take her days just to polish all those shoes!" When we have many things, we cannot enjoy them; we can only serve them. When we reduce our possessions to a comfortable minimum, we find we have plenty of time for the things that make life worthwhile.

## The inevitable last step

The man in this newspaper article, however, thought otherwise. He was determined to keep what he had.

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After urging us to stock up on groceries, he brought in the second G. “Buy gold” – coins, ingots, bricks, it doesn’t matter. Currency will be worthless in a disaster, he explains, but no matter what happens to the economy, we should always be able to get enough canned vegetables and spark plugs with a Krugerrand.

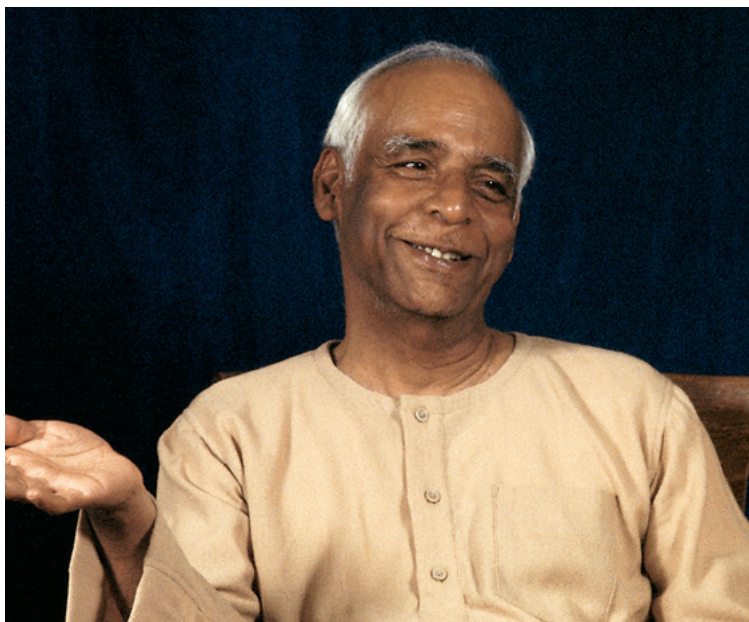
At this point I felt as if I had strayed into Alice’s Wonderland. But I read on, steeling myself for the inevitable last step, the third G: guns. Doesn’t Jesus say, “Where your treasure is, there your heart is also”? It’s not enough to stock up on the material necessities of life. We should prepare to defend it all – ourselves, our groceries, our gold, our automobile parts – against anyone who might want to take it away from us.

Without any wrong intentions, without any desire for animosity, that is where the path has to lead. “I don’t want war,” Bismarck is said to have protested. “I just want to get what I want.”

### **Into the light of day**

After this dismal article, I turned to the next page of the newspaper and read a wholly different story. The page was devoted to Mother Teresa of Calcutta and her work. My eye went first to a box with highlights from the speech she gave on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, and I felt like I was emerging from darkness into the light of day. She began with the Prayer of Saint Francis, which has been the centerpiece of my method of meditation for almost half a century: “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love . . .”

Eyewitness accounts of the Nobel ceremonies made it clear that it is not millionaires and military leaders whom the world



Easwaran, 1970s.

loves, nor those who “sit in the seats of the mighty,” but those who give their lives to the nameless men, women, and children whom the Indian poet Tagore called “the lowest, the lowliest, and the lost.” When Mother Teresa arrived in Oslo, thousands of ordinary citizens turned out to welcome her in a torchlight procession and present her with what they called the “Poor People’s Nobel Prize”: some seventy thousand dollars, the sum of many small donations from little people like you and me. It was their way of saying, “She lives for all of us.” When she received the Nobel Prize, she said, “I accept this in the name of the poor” – not merely in India but the poor everywhere, even in wealthy countries like the United States.

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## A heart flooded with love

“By blood,” Mother Teresa says, “I am Albanian. By citizenship, an Indian. By faith, I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the world.” That’s not just rhetoric. When your sense of *I* and *mine* has been erased, you can work in Calcutta and be of comfort to people in the East End of London or New York City. Those whose hearts are flooded with love for all are present everywhere.

Despite a tiny and physically frail frame, Mother Teresa had the vitality of a twenty-year-old even in her twilight years. In fact, like Gandhi, the older she got, the more she tried to do – and the more she tried to do, the more deeply she drew on her inner resources of vitality, wisdom, and love – resources that lie within every one of us.

One touch in the Nobel Prize drama in Oslo I found especially appealing. Ordinarily, Nobel recipients are honored with a sumptuous banquet. Mother Teresa asked the committee, “Please cancel the banquet and give the money to me for the poor.”

It was a perfect gesture, which can inspire all of us on our much smaller stage. If your boyfriend offers to buy you something expensive, just tell him kindly, “Thank you, but there are people who are hungry. Would you send the money to someone who is helping them?” If he loves you, that kind of talk will not turn him away; it will make him fall even more deeply in love.

## “They have not eaten either”

Another anecdote moved me because in Calcutta, the differences between Hindus and Muslims have been exploited for decades to the point of terrible violence.

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“Some weeks back,” Mother Teresa related, “I heard there was a family who had not eaten for some days – a Hindu family – so I took some rice and I went to the family. Before I knew where I was, the mother of the family had divided the rice into two, and she took the other half to the next-door neighbors, who happened to be a Muslim family.

“Then I asked her, ‘How much will all of you have to share? There are ten of you with that bit of rice.’ The mother replied, ‘They have not eaten either.’”

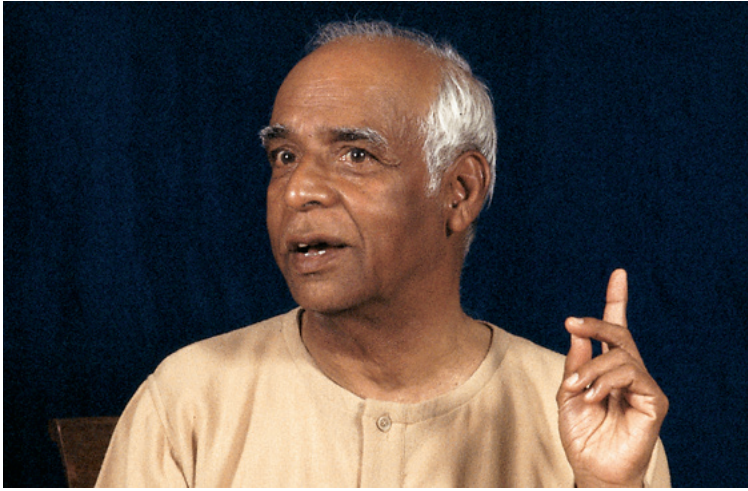
What a contrast to “groceries, gold, and guns”!

### **From a small beginning**

Mother Teresa was not born a saint. Yet from the age of twelve, when most of us were preoccupied with school and friends, she wanted to lead the spiritual life – just like her beloved namesake, little Thérèse of Lisieux. So, like Thérèse, she began with single-minded determination to make herself “an instrument of God’s peace.” In 1928, at the age of eighteen, Teresa joined a Catholic missionary order and was sent to India to teach at girls’ schools in Darjeeling and then Calcutta. The work was comfortable, but she was constantly reminded of the poor she saw in the slums nearby.

In 1946, when she was traveling by rail from the plains of India up to the Himalayas, she heard a command from deep within. “The message was quite clear,” she said later. “I was to leave the convent and help the poor whilst living among them. It was an order. I knew where I belonged, but I did not know how to get there.”

As a nun, Teresa did not have any resources with which to follow this command. She had no place to stay outside the convent, no food, no supporters. But that didn’t deter

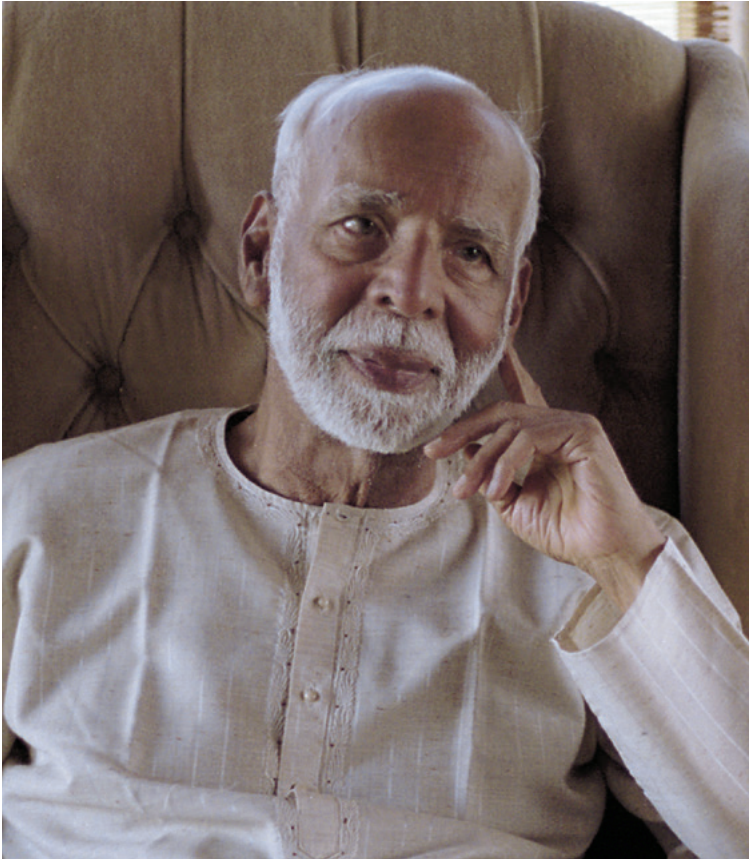


Easwaran, 1970s

her. After a few months of medical training, she stepped out into the streets of Calcutta as alone and as poor as those she served and threw herself heart and soul into trying to help the children and the sick she met, one by one. From that small beginning grew a new Christian order that is now active around the world.

### **The way of joy**

This kind of service is the very highest of human motivations. People sometimes object, “You don’t know human nature. Without incentives like profit or prestige, nobody will respond for very long.” That is a very shallow view of human nature. We can never give our best out of a selfish motive. If that seems contrary to reality, it is mostly because we so seldom see a higher alternative.



Easwaran, 1990s.



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When Mother Teresa began her work, one of her first companions was a Bengali girl of nineteen. She saw how much Teresa had given up and how much she had to endure, how much she was giving and how people responded to her help, and she said, “I’ll follow wherever you go, suffer whatever you suffer.”

Today, thousands of men and women have responded like this to Mother Teresa’s call to what is highest in our nature: not the desire to get but the need to give, to love, to serve. To everyone she must have said, “There’s no salary. There may not even be enough to eat. Just more and more work, more and more sacrifice, more and more service.” And people replied, “Mother, that is what we want.” In the terms with which the world usually measures, it sounds terribly arduous.

Yet all we have to do is look at this woman’s face, listen to her words or to those she has helped, to judge for ourselves whether she has chosen the way of sorrow or the way of joy.

## **We start where we are**

To choose this path, we do not need to be saints. We do not need to measure ourselves against someone like Mother Teresa or work on her grand scale. We can begin on our own scale, right where we are. And it need not be one life-altering decision. These two paths, the self-centered and the selfless, open to us constantly, in a thousand little choices throughout the day. Any time we choose to give rather than get, we have taken a step on the path of true fulfillment.

Wherever we are, whatever our place in life, we can all fulfill our boundless capacity for love. The choice is up to us. 🌸

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## COMMUNITY STORIES

### **Patience, resilience, and security**

COVID-19 has red penciled parts of my life – a silver lining within this difficult, sometimes tragic pandemic. More accurately, I've been given the opportunity to use the side of the sharpened red pencil to shade certain areas of my day. In other words, it's not that I've cut much out, but that I'm not living quite the same, either.

Although I could describe how our stay-at-home guidelines have touched each of the eight points for me, Slowing Down is at the top of my list. By not going places (often on tight timelines to fit it all in), I am able to do the things I need to do (working remotely, exercising, engaging with family and friends) in a less hurried way. Additionally, I'm pulling back the pace of how quickly I feel the need to understand a problem, devise a solution, and move on.

This is allowing time for me to experience feelings (mine and others') and be grounded in joys and sorrows at a deeper level than before. Most of all, I am getting more rest. Getting enough good sleep (for perhaps the first extended period in my adult life) is yielding benefits in patience, resilience and inner security.

While hoping for a safe, productive resolution to the COVID-19 situation, I simultaneously desire (I believe it is a selfless one) to somehow maintain these slowed down features of life afterward, allowing me to be a more effective instrument of peace. May our Teacher guide me on the path!

— Merritt, US

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## Service to the Lord in all

A week into the stay-at-home order, I was feeling overwhelmed with all the terrible stories on the news. My feelings peaked when I got a message from our past minister, telling how people in a Central American community that our church supports financially are on the brink of starvation. This was on top of multiple pleas from all the organizations I had ever donated to, asking for donations to help with the crises.

I felt sick to my stomach, anxious, depressed and helpless. I felt like there were too many needs and wondered what difference my contributions could make. And where would I contribute? Each place was as deserving as the next.

The next morning, still feeling anxious, I chose as my first meditation passage the one that starts, "Send us Thy Peace, O Lord." I felt an amazing calm settle over me. In our satsang the following evening we talked about how Easwaran always said that service to one is service to the Lord in all. The next day I was able to sit down and calmly send out donations to several organizations, without feeling like my contributions were not enough.

— Margie, Colorado

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## Sharing the blessings

My husband and I are more fortunate than many. Our immediate family is healthy, we are still employed, we no longer need to worry about childcare. And, most importantly, we have the tools that Easwaran gave us to deal with the fear, disruption, and uncertainty we all face at this moment. I was recently reminded that these invaluable tools are not just for our personal use, but also to ease the suffering of those around us.

A couple of weeks ago, I returned to my virtual office refreshed after a three-day weekend that included daily meditation, virtual satsang, and mantram walks in nature. After a few hours back at work, however, I realized that not all my coworkers felt so upbeat and energetic. One shared to me that the pandemic was causing her acute anxiety, compounded by a feeling of being trapped in her urban neighborhood.

The passage “Prayer for Peace” came to mind, including these lines:

Send us Thy Peace, O Lord, that amidst our worldly strife we may enjoy Thy bliss.

Send us Thy peace, O Lord that we may endure all, tolerate all in the thought of Thy grace and mercy.

I patiently encouraged my coworker to share her struggle with me, and my calmness seemed to alleviate some of her anxiety.

After work that evening, I realized from the earlier

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conversation with my coworker that one of my own family members was feeling similar anguish. By giving her my full attention, I helped lift her mood. In these and other small ways, I hope to continue to share the tremendous blessings we have received from our teacher.

— Margaret, US

## Prayer for Peace

*Hazrat Inayat Khan*

Send us Thy peace, O Lord, which is perfect and everlasting,  
that our souls may radiate peace.

Send us Thy peace, O Lord, that we may think, act, and speak  
harmoniously.

Send us Thy peace, O Lord, that we may be contented and  
thankful for Thy bountiful gifts.

Send us Thy peace, O Lord, that amidst our worldly strife we  
may enjoy Thy bliss.

Send us Thy peace, O Lord, that we may endure all, tolerate all  
in the thought of Thy grace and mercy.

Send us Thy peace, O Lord, that our lives may become a divine  
vision, and in Thy light all darkness may vanish.

Send us Thy peace, O Lord, our Father and Mother, that we,  
Thy children on earth, may all unite in one family.

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## Resources deep within me

A passage that is particularly meaningful and comforting to me these days is “The City of God” by Ravidas. I find this passage to be both inspirational and aspirational. The second verse especially continually inspires me to return to my meditation practice each day, where my mind becomes still and with my best effort, I try to focus all my attention in the “sacrament of the present moment.”

Then, with grace from my Teacher, I aspire to access and share the many resources that are deep within me: patience, energy, and creativity as well as love and wisdom.

— Deb, Colorado

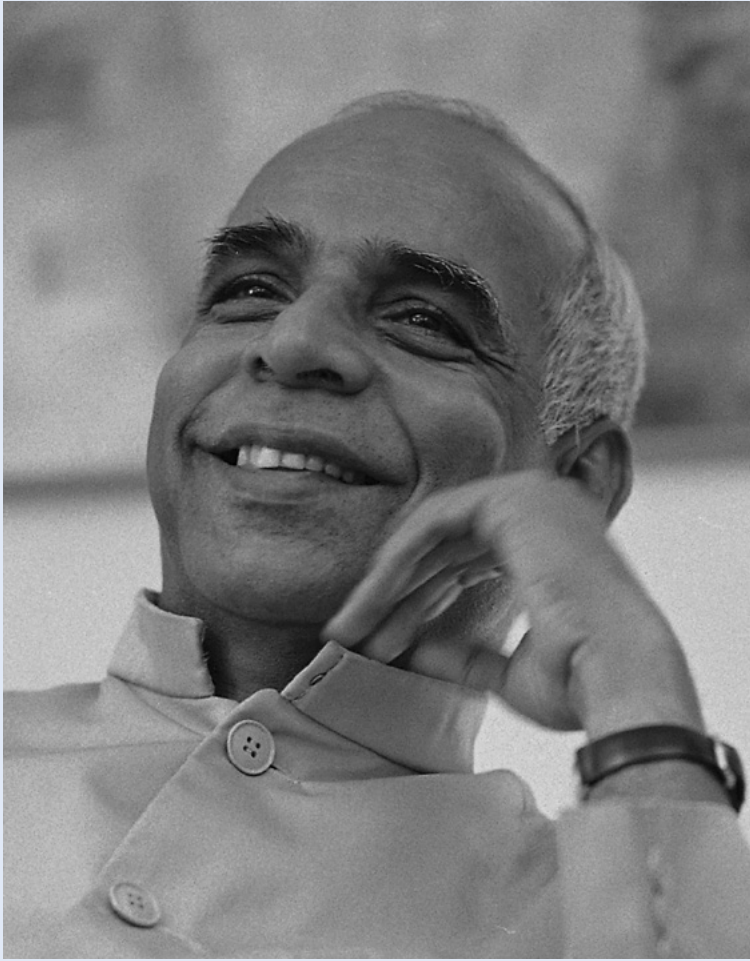
## The City of God

Grieve Not is the name of my town.  
Pain and fear cannot enter there,  
Free from possessions, free from life’s taxes,  
Free from fear of disease and death.

After much wandering I am come back home  
Where turns not the wheel of time and change,  
And my Emperor rules, without a second or third,  
In Abadan, filled with love and wisdom.

The citizens are rich in the wealth of the heart,  
And they live ever free in the City of God.  
Listen to Ravidas, just a cobbler:

“All who live here are my true friends.”



Easwaran, 1970s.

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## An extraordinary opportunity

During this difficult time, one meditation passage in particular has called to me: the prayer “I Know That He Reveals Himself” by Saint Symeon the New Theologian. It begins, “I sit alone apart from all the world and see before me Him who transcends the world.”

I came across it by chance a few days ago and recognized the first line, but the idea of being apart from the world had never struck me before as it did while we were beginning the sixth week of Colorado’s stay at home order. Except for an occasional greeting at the obligatory six-foot distance, my husband and I had had no face to face interaction with anyone but each other in all that time! Like many of us, I have never felt so estranged from my normal life and interactions as I do now.

I’ve been meditating on this passage every day, and as always happens with a new passage, I am just beginning to plumb its depths. Simply put, it couldn’t have come at a better time. Saint Symeon writes:

I know that He who transcends all creation  
takes me into Himself and hides me in His arms  
apart from all the world;  
and then I, small and mortal in this world,  
I see the Creator of the world within me  
and know that I can never die  
because I am within all life  
and all of life wells up in me.





Easwaran, 1970s.

This passage has transformed the experience of pandemic as a time of fear, loneliness and deprivation into an extraordinary opportunity to share in Saint Symeon's personal experience of transcendence – of overcoming fear of our fragile human condition with the realization that all creation is informed with the Creator's immutable and omnipresent love.

— Annie, Colorado

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## I Know That He Reveals Himself

*Saint Symeon The New Theologian*

I sit alone apart from all the world  
and see before me Him who transcends the world.  
I see Him and He sees me;  
I love Him and I believe that He loves me;  
I am nourished and satisfied only with His vision.  
United with Him I go beyond heaven.

All this I know beyond any doubt,  
but where my body is I do not know.

I know that He who is immovable descends;  
I know that He who is invisible appears to me;  
I know that He who transcends all creation  
takes me into Himself and hides me in His arms  
apart from all the world;  
and then I, small and mortal in this world,  
I see the Creator of the world within me  
and know that I can never die  
because I am within all life  
and all of life wells up in me.

He is in my heart, He is in heaven;  
both here and there He reveals Himself to me  
in equal glory.



Looking towards the garden at Ramagiri Ashram.

### **Passage Recordings**

If you'd like to listen to Eknath Easwaran and Christine Easwaran reading the passages that our contributors have recommended, you can find them all on our website [here](#). Click on the passage and then scroll down to find the recording.

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## Satsang with a saint

Weeks of lockdown in the city where I live has led to changes in my shopping habits. This is excellent sense-training of course – I've bought less, mended more, shared my grocery shopping with my neighbors, lived more simply, not spent so long on the internet, and am much more appreciative now when fresh green vegetables and sourdough come my way.

On one hand this has led to a definite feeling of peace, but occasionally my lower self whimpers that it's feeling deprived. That's when spiritual reading and satsang come to the rescue. I need something that will lift my spirits and make me lighten up – a mystic with a sense of humour.

Right now I've turned to a book by Swami Ramdas. My edition even has a preface from Easwaran, who met Swami Ramdas and describes him as "one of the most lovable and most appealing saints to be found anywhere." To accompany my reading, I've been meditating on the passage "Unshakable Faith."

If in doubt, have satsang with a saint.

— A passage meditator, UK

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## Unshakable Faith

*Swami Ramdas*

Unshakable faith in God and His will:

Nothing short of this.

Take thorough refuge in Him.

Give up all fears,  
all anxieties, all doubts,  
all thoughts of weakness.

You have put yourself under the guidance and control  
of an all-powerful being.

Let Him do what He pleases with you.

Give up *I* and *mine*. Make no plans.

Let nothing of the past or future disturb you.

God is the sole doer and you are His child, His servant.

Your *I* and *mine* has no existence. It is all He, He alone.

Submit, resign, surrender yourself to Him.

Be always cheerful, peaceful, and blissful.

In this state you will always remain.

This is your goal.

God is always in you and you are always in Him.

He and you are one. This is the truth.

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## A spiritual schedule during a pandemic

More and more over the years, I have come to appreciate the benefits of working my everyday schedule around anchor points in the eight-point program. It has become clear that my householder life is there to enable the spiritual life, not vice versa.

Now in the pandemic, in addition to my day job, I'm volunteering six days a week at the local health department. Yesterday we swabbed and listened to the stories of dozens of symptomatic or exposed people at a homeless shelter. The need is boundless.

### A lifeline to our teacher's grace

But the spiritual schedule – morning and evening meditation, slowed-down one-pointed attention on selfless service and putting others first – is the constant around which everything else can vary. The steadfastness of the spiritual schedule helps me to make my best contribution while staying in balance, and every day I can see it rubbing off on others even as it rubs off my own rough edges.

Somehow, in this busiest of times, watching an Easwaran video whenever I can after evening spiritual reading has become a regular part of the weekly schedule. The evening video (from the Video of the Month or the Easwaran Digital Library) doesn't feel like one more thing to squeeze in, but a lifeline to our teacher's grace that grounds the householder life in the shared wisdom of the world's spiritual traditions.

— A passage meditator, US

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## Resources to keep you inspired

Join us for our free online **BMCM Satsang Live** on Tuesdays and Sundays with Diana Lightman, David Bishop, and Paul Bantle from our Programs team. Find out more [here](#).



Watch videos of Easwaran giving class to his students by [signing up](#) for the free **Easwaran Digital Library**. Read more [here](#).

Take part in our online [eSatsang](#), with weekly inspiration and fellowship with passage meditators around the world.

You'll also be hearing soon from our Programs department about our new upcoming **online initiatives for 2020**.

If you'd like to read more from **Easwaran's books**, then we suggest starting with *Strength in the Storm* – our first article is taken from Chapter 1. The nine tips were taken mainly from *The Mantram Handbook*, *Take Your Time*, and *Conquest of Mind*, and our second article comes from the Winter 2005 edition of the *Blue Mountain Journal*.

If you have any **questions or feedback** for us on this journal, we're always very pleased to hear from you. Contact us at [info@bmcm.org](mailto:info@bmcm.org).

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## Spring at Ramagiri Ashram



Christine Easwaran.



Outside Shanti, the meditation hall.





A damp morning in Ramagiri.



The BMCM access road.







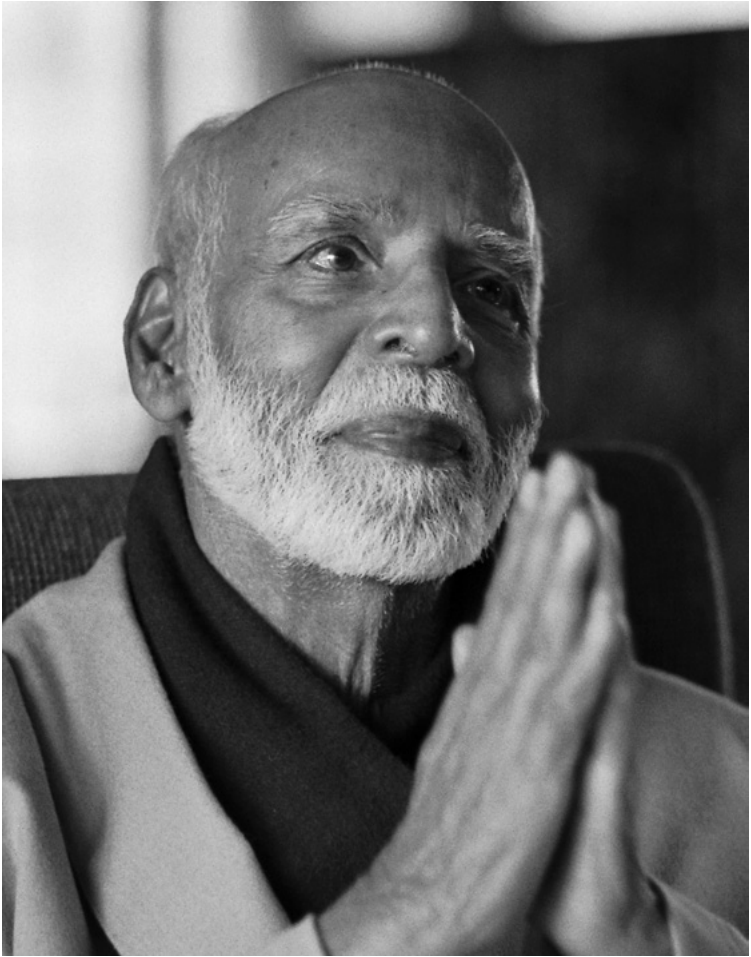
Meadows and hills at Ramagiri.



Writing mantras at the ashram.



Cutting flowers for the ashram.



Easwaran, 1990s.

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# A Deep Desire to Live for Others

by Eknath Easwaran

The highest, most effective kind of resistance – to illness of any kind whatsoever, even to the ravages of time – is a deep, deep desire to live for others. This is a tremendous force, which I can testify to from my own life.

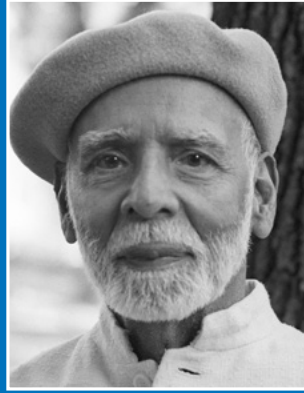
I am talking now about the deepest roots of the human being.

Psychologists know the vital necessity of the will to live; yet when you live only for yourself, how deep can the will go? My will to live springs from the love that floods my heart when I realize that the Lord himself finds it possible to inhabit your heart and mine; and this love expresses itself in the myriad choices I make in my daily life. Most of us have experienced firsthand the benefits we reap from loving two or three people. Imagine what love for four billion people can do!

All of us can be much healthier than we are, much more secure. Most of us can live much longer than we expect to, and work more actively right into the evening of our life. Even in our nineties we can be productive, creative, cherished, and respected, because our life has become a shining gift.

The time to cultivate the habits of living that make all this possible is now.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eknath Easwaran". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial letter.



As you go deeper and deeper into  
your consciousness, you discover that you have  
vast resources of which you never dreamed:  
resources with which to help yourself,  
to help your family and community,  
to contribute to your society,  
to change the very world for the better.

— *Eknath Easwaran*



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