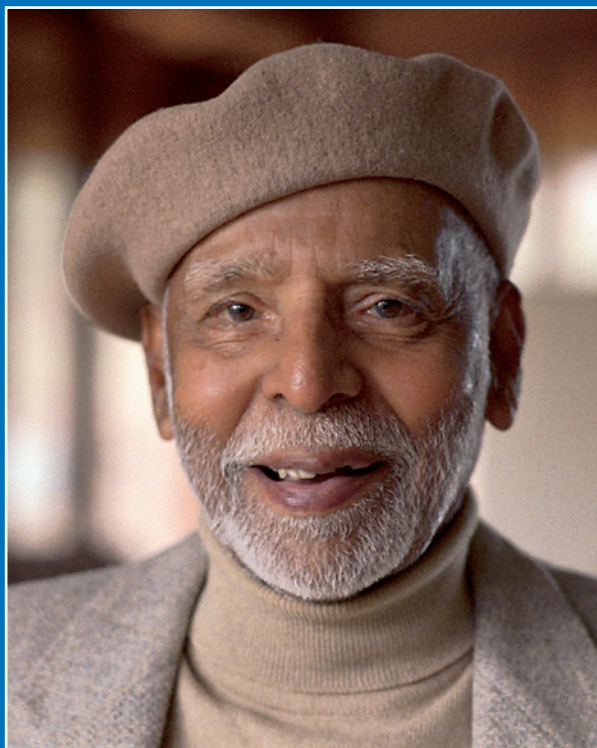


Ekknath Easwaran on Meditation & Spiritual Living

Blue Mountain Journal

SPRING 2021



A World in Crisis

PART 3

Living in Unity

In This Issue

With a tumultuous year behind us and an uncertain one ahead, Easwaran's teachings give us guidance and stability, reminding us of the eternal, unchanging spiritual reality.

This issue explores the law of unity, and opens with an article on what Easwaran describes as a magnificent simile, that of the Tree of Life. Living in unity is expressed in kind conduct towards those who disagree with us, as shown in Easwaran's second article, "At Home with Friends and Enemies." This spiritual law also reveals itself through selfless service, the topic of "Nine Ways to Work in Unity." Reader stories give examples of applications of all these teachings. Meditation is key, so this journal includes Easwaran's brief instructions, and news of our BMCM online retreats.

As we go into the new year, we hold these words from Easwaran in our hearts: "May people everywhere live in abiding peace and love – for all of us are one, and joy can be found only in the joy of all."

— The BMCM Editorial Team

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From Easwaran

Spiritual laws and forces, the mystics remind us, are just as verifiable as those the physicists find. The law of life's unity is written into the very essence of creation. It comes into play whenever a person draws on the power of love and self-sacrifice to heal a relationship or stanch the spread of violence.

Hatred has hijacked some of the most cultured of countries. In parts of our own country, it is happening today. Unless we make a relentless, continuous effort not to open the door to hatred, we can find ourselves dwelling inside a mind that views the world with suspicion and hostility.

To right wrongs and help others correct their faults, we have to focus on what is positive and never give in to negative thinking. Love, sympathy, and forbearance require steady strength of mind.

The key to this is giving – our time, our talents, our resources, our skills, our lives – to selfless work, some cause greater than our small personal interests. By working hard to give what we can, and by cultivating kindness and compassion under every provocation, we can escape destructive ways of thinking.

When negative thinking ceases completely, what remains is our real nature: love itself, which sheds light wherever it turns without ever asking who “deserves” it. This exalted state is our real human legacy, and until we claim it, we have not done what we are here on earth to do.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Easwaran".



Easwaran, 1970s.

The Tree of Life: A Symbol of Unity

Eknath Easwaran

My native state of Kerala in South India is rich in a wide variety of beautiful trees. First there is the mango, whose ivory blossoms produce a beautiful fruit that is a treat for the eyes as well as the palate. Then there is the jack tree, with fruits as large as watermelons. The jack and the mango grow almost everywhere in Kerala, and their fruits are staples of the diet. In fact, in my mother tongue, when you want to know how well-to-do a person is, you ask how many jack and mango trees he has in his backyard. It is like asking in America, “How many cars does he have in his garage?”

Then there is the cashew tree, from which you get the cashew nuts that are popular in this country. Whenever I see these delicious nuts in markets here, I always get nostalgic for Kerala, where they are native. The very name of Kerala comes from a tree, for Kerala means the land of the coconut palm. So you can see how important trees are to us.

In India there are also trees associated with the spiritual tradition, such as the banyan and the pipal, which often grow in front of the temples of South India. Once a friend in California asked me if we considered these trees sacred. She understood immediately when I replied, “Don’t you think the redwood trees are sacred?”

So whether we live in California or Kerala, the tree is the perfect symbol of the unity of creation.

A tree rooted in God

Sri Krishna declares in the Bhagavad Gita that sages speak of the immutable Tree of Life, with its taproot above and its branches below. This image is one of the most magnificent in the Gita. The Tree of Life has its root above because it comes straight from the consciousness of God; it is rooted completely in God. The branches are below, here on earth; their countless leaves are the billions of creatures in this world, including animals, birds, insects, plants, and human beings.

Most of this tree is not physical. The whole phenomenal universe – matter, energy, and mind – is only its canopy of leaves. This is all we can see. But each leaf grows from a twig, which grows from a branch, which in turn grows from a vast trunk. And supporting the trunk and all its leaves and twigs and branches, completely hidden, is the taproot, extending deep into pure being. Farthest from the root is the world of multiplicity and change: countless little leaves. But the taproot of this tree is the Lord, the eternal, changeless Self.

“Just a leaf”

The application of this tremendous image is personal and practical. As long as we live on the surface of life, we believe we are separate, individual leaves. We lead private lives that bear no relation to the rest of the tree, even though when we are cut off from that tree we have no life.

Look at the problems that face the world today because of this crude superstition that we are separate. We have violence in our streets and homes because individuals value no one's welfare but their own. We have poverty and war around the globe because nations and corporations pursue private ends without regard to the cost to others.

Most poignantly of all, we see men, women, and even children cutting themselves off from others around them so they can pursue what they want without hindrance.

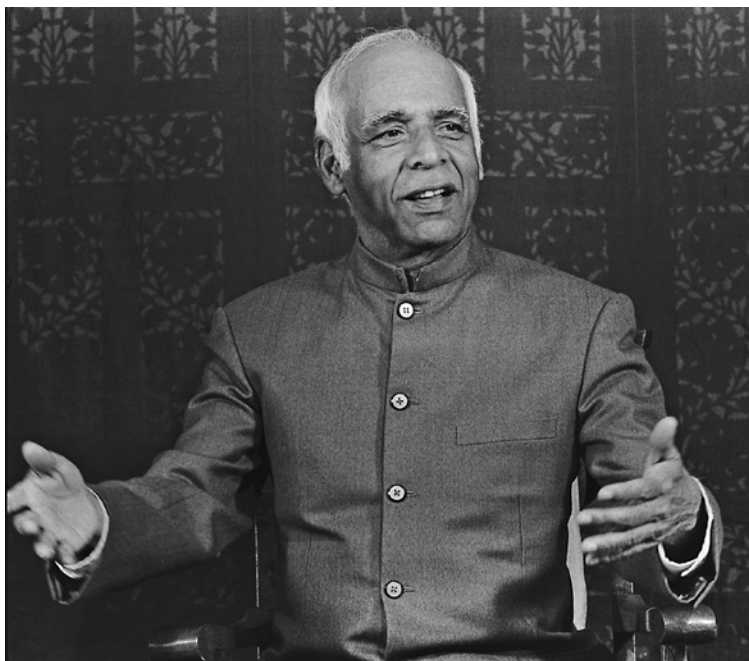
When we are driven by self-will like this, we cannot imagine we are forfeiting the whole of life for the little leaf we call our individual personality.

It is because we assume we are insignificant, private individuals that we sometimes feel we need not be concerned about our family's welfare or the society in which we live. "I'm just a leaf," we may be tempted to think, "so what can I do?" It matters even if one person drops out, just as it matters if one person makes a contribution.

All part of the same tree

In practical terms, the Gita is saying that you and I are one – that ninety-nine percent is the same, whether we come from the East or the West, because we are all leaves of the same tree. I admit that there is a fascinating one percent difference, and this is to be treasured, too, because otherwise things would be a little monotonous. The leaf, after all, does have a few little eccentricities: perhaps a certain accent, a particular way of wearing a beret, a fondness for Victorian poets. But we should never let this one percent difference in culture, color, religion be exaggerated to such an exorbitant degree that we forget we are all part of the same tree.

One of the surest proofs of deep spiritual experience is that you will have respect for all people, whatever country they come from, whatever the color of their skin, whatever religion they profess. One of the greatest emperors the world has seen, Ashoka, who ruled India in the third century before Christ, declared in an edict which can still be seen inscribed on pillars



Easwaran, 1970s.

near Delhi, “Anybody who is disrespectful of other religions has no respect for his own.”

A universal test

We all live and have our being in the whole that is God, but the men and women who realize this truth and live accordingly are rare. Yet there is a clear, universal test by which we can recognize those who truly identify with the Tree of Life: they are able to step back from their own personal needs to live in such a manner that their family, their whole society, benefits. They don’t have to wear a button or put an announcement in

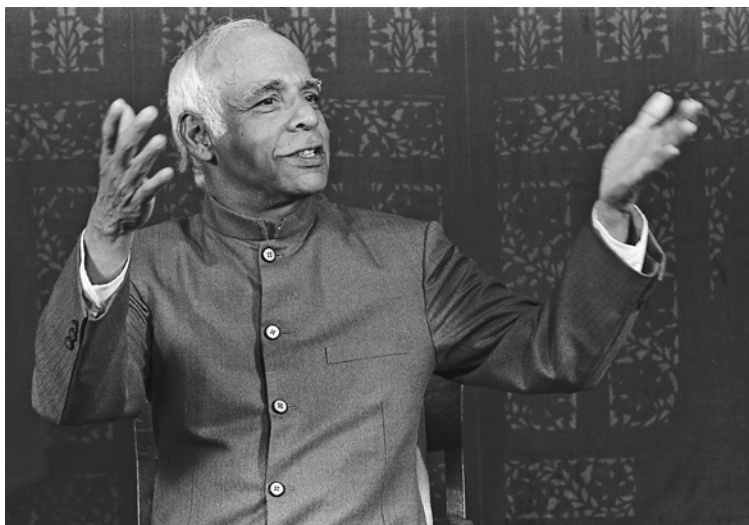
the paper, because this is a sure sign that they have become aware of the entire tree. As the Bible says, “By their fruits you shall know them.”

One way of talking about this is to say that the person who has spiritual awareness acts with what Sri Ramakrishna called the ripe ego, which means that while we appear to have a separate personality, we know that we really do not. We seem to act as private individuals, retaining the innocent quirks and idiosyncrasies of our personality, but at the same time we know that there is no frontier between the rest of life and ourselves.

If we want to know whether a person is developing spiritually or, to phrase it differently, if we want to know if someone really loves, we must observe their conduct. We can ask a few simple questions: Can they forgive? Do they return love for hatred? If the answer is yes, then they are growing spiritually. On the other hand, if they nurse grudges, harbor resentments, and wait for their adversaries to come down a dark alley alone, then they are far from realizing that we are all a part of the one Tree of Life, whatever claims they may make.

Fascinated by the leaves

We are all familiar with the unflattering expression, “That person can’t see the forest for the trees.” Similarly, it can be said that most of us don’t see the tree for the leaves. We fail to see the Tree of Life because we are fascinated by the leaves. We are so obsessed by millions of little fragments of foliage that we are not aware of the tree at all. We do not see that without the tree the leaves do not have any life – that it is the sap, coming from the very life of the tree, that flows into the leaves and supports them.



Easwaran, 1970s.

In the modern world most of the emphasis is on separateness, on the leaf rather than the tree. Every day in countless ways we receive the message, “Find your joy in your own way, live your life in your own way, find your fulfillment in your own way.” This drive for personal satisfaction is based on a complete fiction: that the leaf can prosper without the living tree. In reality, none of us are separate. We are all part of the same creation, drawing our strength, happiness, and fulfillment from the cosmic tree.

Because we believe without reservation that we are just a leaf, we ordinarily act as if there is no tree at all. If we have self-will – which all of us do – that is unmistakable proof that we presume we are a little entity that is entirely self-sustaining.

If we get agitated because somebody says no to us, it is because we assume that we are separate from others. In short, if we live for our own personal satisfaction, we accept that we are a leaf, even though we may have a little button saying, “I am the Tree.”

Joined to a twig

The question we may ask is, “How can a leaf really become the tree?” The answer is that we all start as leaves, which means that we live very much on the superficial level, ready to be blown away by any passing gust. But when we take to the practice of meditation and begin to reduce our self-will, we begin to discover that we are joined to a twig. It may be a small twig with just two or three leaves – just our family, perhaps – but we no longer feel we are just a leaf. We are able to say, “Yes, my partner, my children, and I are one.” This is an important discovery, and our actions will show it, which is the only test that is valid.

As long as you are not aware of the twig, it may be difficult to forget your own plans and remember the needs of your family. “What is the harm of taking one evening away from them?” you may wonder. But when we become aware of the needs of the twig, we naturally want to be together with our family, to listen to our children talk about their day, to help our partner with the dishes. These are the ways in which we show that we have understood we are a part of the Tree of Life.

Becoming secure

I see a little sign sometimes on the back of trucks: “Safety Is No Accident.” Security is no accident either. Security is something we have to work at. Any human being can become completely secure if he or she tries every day in every way

to make the maximum contribution to the prosperity and harmony of all without asking, “Does this please me? Do I enjoy this? Do I have a good time at it? Am I going to be rewarded or recognized for it?” But this is hard and challenging, and that is probably why so few people attempt it.

On the other hand, when we try to build our lives on unity, remembering the needs of those around us, we enjoy sound health and unassailable security. As we become more and more detached from our own predispositions and prejudices, as we dwell less and less on what others are doing to us, or not doing to us, a tremendous change begins to take place. We get less and less agitated by personal problems.

Whenever you tend to dwell on yourself, whenever you forget the needs of others, the mantram is a reminder that you are the entire tree. Repeating the mantram is like writing a note: “Remember, you are not just a leaf on the tree; you are the tree.”

From twig to branch

After many years of meditation, as our spiritual awareness deepens, we make an even more remarkable discovery. Slowly we discover we are part of a whole branch. It is such an amazing discovery that we can hardly believe it. We thought we were a twig, which was revolutionary enough! Now we see that we are a big branch on the tree.

In other words, we now yearn for the welfare of not just our own family, not even just our community, but the welfare of the whole city. If there is an act of violence in Berkeley, it hurts us, because it is our children who are involved. It's no longer the children from across town. We feel exactly as if our own children had been attacked, and we respond immediately. We go to their rescue just as we would if our son or daughter

had been involved. We begin to find the time, money, energy, and resources to protect all children. There is no limit to how wide our concern can extend, because in meditation our consciousness expands little by little, until ultimately we discover we are the very root of the Tree of Life.

When we begin to understand that all creatures are a part of the great cosmic Tree of Life, we will find that the artistry of our love expresses itself in almost infinite ways. We should never feel that our capacity to love is limited. If this is our belief, we will try to love only one or two people. We will, at most, be able to think only about their needs; we will be happy only when we are with them. While there can be a selfless element in this, it is a small fraction of our real capacity. When you love all, the Upanishads say, your joy will be multiplied a million times.

Fallen leaves

Tragically, even though we all share in the infinite life that flows from God, it seems to be the human condition to lead the desolate, confined life of a leaf, which ends inevitably in death. In the autumn, when the streets are covered with fallen leaves in plenty, I always remember the poignant lines of Omar Khayyam:

The wine of life is oozing drop by drop,
The leaves of life are falling one by one.

Like leaves, we come into this life, are here for a few days, and then are gone. As long as we believe that we are separate, we inevitably have to die. The feverish little fragment never truly lives. Our immortality is in the whole, which never dies.

In living just for personal profit and pleasure, no matter



Easwaran, 1970s.

under what philosophical name we may place it, our real personality withers away. It cannot be otherwise. It is like picking a leaf, planting it, and expecting a big tree to grow. After a day or two the leaf will have withered away, but we don't seem to notice. We keep watering it and watching for it to grow. But the leaf is dead.

When we forget the tree, we shrivel and fall away. Our lives become burdensome to others and to ourselves. But through the constant endeavor to realize the unity of life, all our relations blossom, in our community as well as in the bosom of our family. Nothing is lost and everything is gained.

Enriching our relationships

Spiritual awareness – that is, awareness of the Tree of Life – is not an exotic flower that blooms in a forgotten garden, unseen by the eyes of the world. It is something that enriches every relationship in our life every day. As our spiritual awareness grows, we find that we don't have to ponder before we can think of something loving to say.

The highest values, expressed in the most appropriate words, will come naturally to mind. We won't have to struggle to be graceful or gracious in our everyday relationships. If we are truly aware that all life is one, that we are all a part of the living Tree of Life, it will be impossible for us to be ungracious. These are some of the gifts we receive and give as we become more aware of the unity of life.

Aerial roots and the Tree

The Tree of Life is traditionally considered to be one of the giant fig trees found in southern Asia. In an ancient temple compound, where you can see one still growing and spreading while the stones around it are cracked and worn with age, you feel that its roots must reach into the beginning of time.

These species of *Ficus* also have another characteristic: what botanists call aerial roots. In some cases the seeds germinate not in the earth but high in some other tree (such as a palm) where they have been deposited by birds and monkeys. From there they send out long shoots that twine around the trunk of the mother tree until they reach the ground. Then they burrow in and become true roots.

The senses, Sri Krishna says, are like these aerial roots. When we yield to the clamor of the senses we are pushing consciousness out into sensory offshoots, making them

longer and longer. Finally they reach the ground and burrow in, rooting us in the world of change. This is what the media promise us: the senses will supply everything we desire of life. “Indulge your senses,” they say. “Don’t be afraid to build your life on pleasure. If it feels good, do it!” By the time a person in this country reaches the age of twenty, he or she may have received this message a million times – from television and the movies, from magazines, newspapers, and books, and of course from the daily example of other people. With this kind of brainwashing, is it any wonder that our lives are as shaky as leaves?

Out on a limb

It follows that the more sense-oriented we are, the farther we are going from the roots of our being; and the farther we go, the more separate we feel and the more alienated we become. Those who identify with sense-leaves are really out on a limb; any strong breeze can cut them off from their source of sustenance. They become easily insecure, easily frustrated; after a while they may find life so monotonous that it is not worth living.

You will find such people very physically oriented – which means, among other things, that they get easily upset. Since they do not have much security within themselves, they try to correct their upsets by getting something from the pharmacy or the refrigerator and putting it into their mouths. Overeating is one of the most familiar illustrations of how consciousness can be concentrated on a particular sense organ, which really leaves it out on a limb. That is why Gandhi said the control of the palate is such a valuable aid to controlling the mind. If you can withdraw consciousness at will from the sense of taste, your mind will be much less upsettable.

The intimate relationship between senses and sense objects is a recurring theme in the Gita. Just as aerial roots reach out for the ground to dig themselves in, the senses reach out to root themselves in objects of sensory experience. There is nothing wrong with this. It is the nature of senses to grasp, and there is nothing immoral about the force of their attraction, any more than there is about physical forces like magnetism or nuclear binding energy. Forces are not wrong; it is the use to which we put them that can be wrong.

Back to the taproot

In meditation, we learn to withdraw and consolidate prana, or vital energy, from the senses back to our source, the taproot of our being. This takes years to learn. At first, though we are trying to give our attention completely to the passage on which we are meditating, we hear everything that goes on outside us. The reason is that consciousness is still in the ear, waiting to catch sounds. But as you learn to sink deep into yourself, you withdraw consciousness slowly from the ear. The organ still functions, but no hearing takes place. It is the same with the other senses too.

Over a period of years we learn to withdraw consciousness from the sensory level into the mind, then into the intellect, and then into the pure sense of “I,” in which only a shell of separateness remains. Finally, in the tremendous climax of meditation called samadhi, all separateness goes; we are back inside the seed, the Self, from which everything else has sprung.

Afterwards we learn to make this great journey at will, until samadhi becomes permanent and continuous. This is a very satisfying state. No matter what we are doing, we are always in touch with the source of our being.

A permanent selfless force

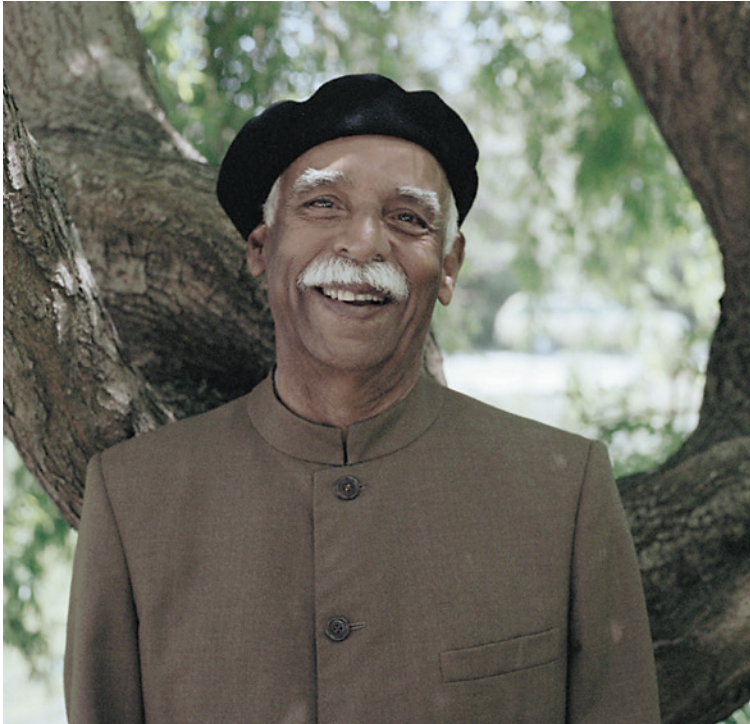
When you discover that you are the entire Tree of Life, that everyone is contained in you and you are contained in everyone, you have realized the unity of life, which is the divine ground of existence. Wherever you go, wherever you live, those around you will benefit from your life. There will always be people to respond to you, to support you, to cherish you, because human nature responds to the highest ideal.

The life of such a person, such as Mahatma Gandhi in our own times, becomes a permanent, selfless force. Even after death his influence continues to bring people together, making them aware of their trusteeship for the resources of the earth and for all creatures. Gandhi is still alive because he is still at work as a real force, making for peace, good will, and unity.

Even one unassuming man or woman leading a selfless life, though he or she may live only seventy or eighty years on earth, enriches all life for all time to come. Even one person leading a selfless life makes a contribution to the community and inspires others to make the same contribution, because human nature responds to a selfless example. When millions of people live in such a manner, aware of the Tree of Life that unites us, we can make this very earth the kingdom of heaven.

Claim the whole Tree

So when you get up in the morning, while you are at work, before going to bed, or whenever you feel ruled by private passions, remind yourself of this magnificent simile, which asks us to claim the whole Tree of Life and not be content with being one passing leaf. 🌿



Easwaran, 1980s.



At Ramagiri Ashram.

The Miracle of Illumination

Shantideva

As a blind man feels when he finds a pearl
in a dustbin, so am I amazed by the miracle
of Bodhi rising in my consciousness.
It is the nectar of immortality that delivers us from death,
The treasure that lifts us above poverty into
the wealth of giving to life,
The tree that gives shade to us when we roam about
scorched by life,
The bridge that takes us across the stormy river of life,
The cool moon of compassion that calms our mind
when it is agitated,
The sun that dispels darkness,
The butter made from the milk of kindness
by churning it with the dharma.
It is a feast of joy to which all are invited.

COMMUNITY STORY

Unity in selfless service

In the two years leading up to my retirement in 2012, I realized I would have more time for selfless service, which Easwaran tells us is an essential part of the spiritual path.

The Bhagavad Gita says: “Engage yourself in selfless service of all around you, for selfless service can lead you at last to me.” And to be led “at last to me,” to the Lord of love in our hearts, would be to find the unity of all things. So I started looking for ways to fulfil this teaching in my life.

Where I could help

I started checking out donating time at our local homeless shelter, or at the Food Bank, or at the soup kitchen, or at other similar places. I was attracted to them all, but none of them had the personal one-on-one relationships that appealed to me.

Then, at a retreat at the BMCM, I heard a fellow sadhak describe how she was helping elderly neighbors, those elderly folk around her own home. This is what I was looking for; immediately I knew this is where I could help. Once I opened my eyes, they were many people all around me to fulfil those words from the Gita. There have been visits to hospital, staying over with someone just home from the hospital, running errands, and driving someone to an appointment. But the visits I spend most of my time at are shut-ins, whether in their home, in an assisted living facility or a nursing home.

My guidelines and practices

So I started with this: I would visit a neighbor and friend of 40 years, who was in a wheelchair in assisted living. I put two guidelines on myself – I would make a visit every week, same day and same time, and I would spend an hour with him with one-pointed attention.

These guidelines have stood the test of time, for I have since found, through visiting countless people, that holding one-pointed attention on someone is harder than I thought it would be; I found my eyes wanted to dart to other things in the room. (It is easier now after years of practice.) It was a wonderful way to apply another point of Easwaran's eight-point program.

Another of the practices that sometimes became essential was the mantram. Sometimes people are sleeping, sometimes they are too weak to converse, and sometimes they are silent. It gave me the opportunity for a "two-fer" doing one-pointed attention and the mantram simultaneously.

Whatever they want to talk about

The second rule was that all conversation would revolve around whatever they wanted to talk about and with no personal agenda by me. Vivekananda says, "Give up the idea you can help anyone; you can only serve." I found his words invaluable because it was very easy to slide into offering my idea of what they should do, which was nothing more than my ideas, my opinions, my self-will poured on them.

Then Covid-19 entered the picture and really put a crimp in this selfless service practice. Currently, I have one lady in assisted living, and call her three times a week for brief chats. And I have two gentlemen; both have had major surgeries but are at their own personal residences. For visiting them, I do not go into their homes, but we meet out on their porch, or their lawn.

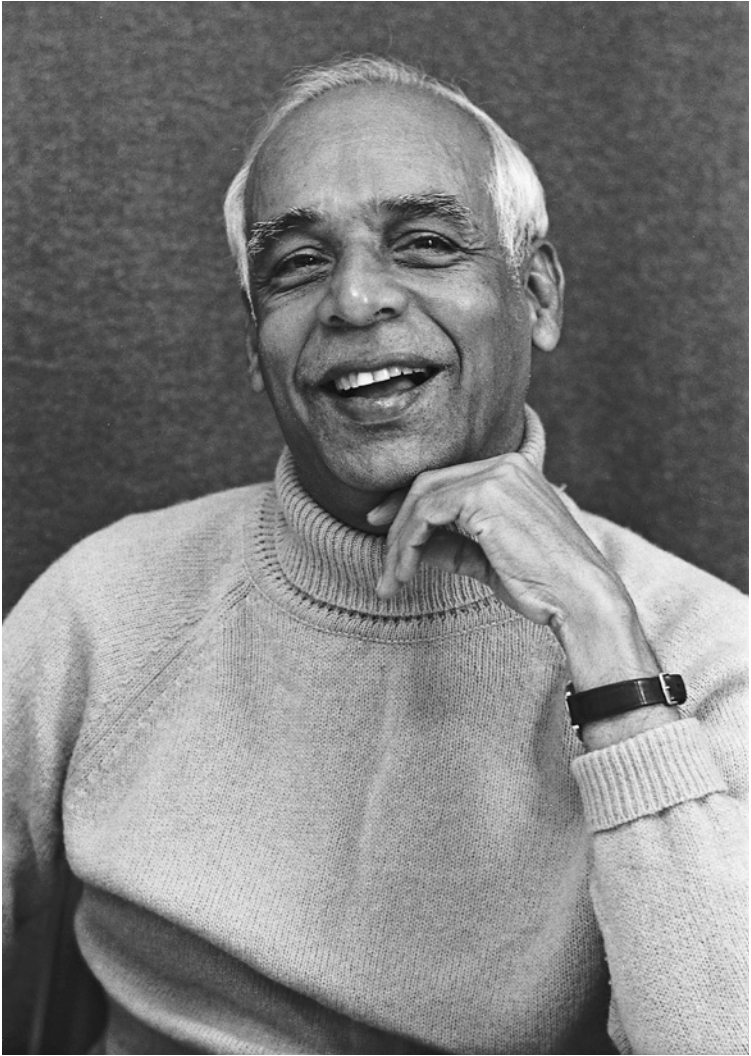
Find the land of unity

Easwaran writes that “meditation is essential, but for the vast majority of us today, meditation by itself is not enough.” To reach the goal, to find the land of unity, we also need the allied disciplines of the eight-point program. I am blessed by these people I have served, as I get to practice putting others first, one-pointed attention, the mantram, slowing down, and sometimes even spiritual reading.

— A passage meditator, California



At Ramagiri Ashram.



Easwaran, 1960s.

At Home with Friends and Enemies

Eknath Easwaran

“Who serves both friend and foe with equal love, not buoyed up by praise or cast down by blame, alike in heat and cold, pleasure and pain, free from selfish attachments and self-will, ever full, in harmony everywhere, firm in faith – such a one is dear to me.”

— Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 12, verses 18–19

I don't think anyone illustrates these verses better than Gandhiji, for whom love and selfless action were one. “I don't want to be at home only with my friends,” he said; “I want to be at home with my enemies too.” It wasn't a manner of speaking; he lived it out through forty years of solid opposition.

The other day I saw some newsreel footage of Gandhi with a prominent political figure who opposed him so relentlessly that people said he had a problem for every solution Gandhi offered. These scenes were shot in 1944, when the two leaders met for a series of talks in which literally millions of lives were hanging in the balance.

It took my breath away to see Gandhi treating the other leader with the affection one shows an intimate friend. At the beginning of each day's discussions the man's face would be a mask of hostility; at the end of the day both men would come out together smiling and joking. Then by the next morning the man would have frozen over again, and Gandhi would start all over with the same cheerful patience, trying to find some common ground.

No one is an opponent

That is how the mystic approaches conflict, and it pulls the rug out from under all the traditional theories. There is a lot being written these days about conflict resolution, which I am glad to see. But no matter what you read, the authors will always say in effect, “This is how you deal with your opponent.”

Gandhi, St. Francis, St. Teresa, would all say, “No. The moment you start thinking about the other person as an opponent, you make it impossible to find a solution.” There are no opponents in a disagreement; there are simply two people facing a common problem. In other words, they are not in opposite camps. They are in the same camp: the real opponent is the problem.

Don't lose faith in others

To apply this, you have to set aside the question of who is to blame. “Judge not,” Jesus warns, “that ye be not judged.” When we keep pointing a finger of judgment at others, we are teaching our mind a lasting habit of condemnation. Sooner or later, that finger of judgment will be aimed point-blank at ourselves.

It is not that people do not sometimes warrant judgment; fault is very easy to find. But judgmental attitudes and a suspicious eye only poison a situation.

This does not mean closing our eyes to wrong behavior. It means simply that we will never lose faith in any person's capacity to change. Without that faith, people lose faith in themselves, and without faith in yourself it is not possible to improve. Everyone deserves our respect, for all are children of an all-compassionate God. This is the most effective way to help others remember their true character.

We have a saying in my mother tongue: “It takes two

to get married and two to quarrel.” No matter what the circumstances, neither person bears sole responsibility for a quarrel. It is an encouraging outlook, because if both are responsible, both together can find a solution – not merely a compromise, but a way actually to resolve the quarrel peacefully.

Listen with detachment and respect

To do this, however, it is necessary to listen – and listen with respect. Don't be afraid if the other person is angry. An angry person is blind. He is so absorbed in his own point of view that he cannot see what is happening around him, including what is happening to himself. We don't get angry with those who are blind; we help them: after all, unless they have taught themselves to be extraordinarily sensitive with their other faculties, blind people can bump into things and hurt themselves and others.

That is just how an angry person is; and when we have to face such people, we need to listen with patience and respect and help them not to rush off blindly into a lamppost. Whether the other person is polite or not, the objective is still the same: how can we find the common point of view?

Here the mystics ask a simple but subtle question: how can you end a quarrel if you do not even hear what the quarrel is about? How can you solve a problem with two sides if you never hear what the other side is? More than that, if you can't listen to the other person with detachment, you will not have the detachment to understand your own position objectively either. It's not just one side of the problem you can't see; it's both. So listen with respect: it may hurt you, it may irritate you, but it is a healing process.

On the same side

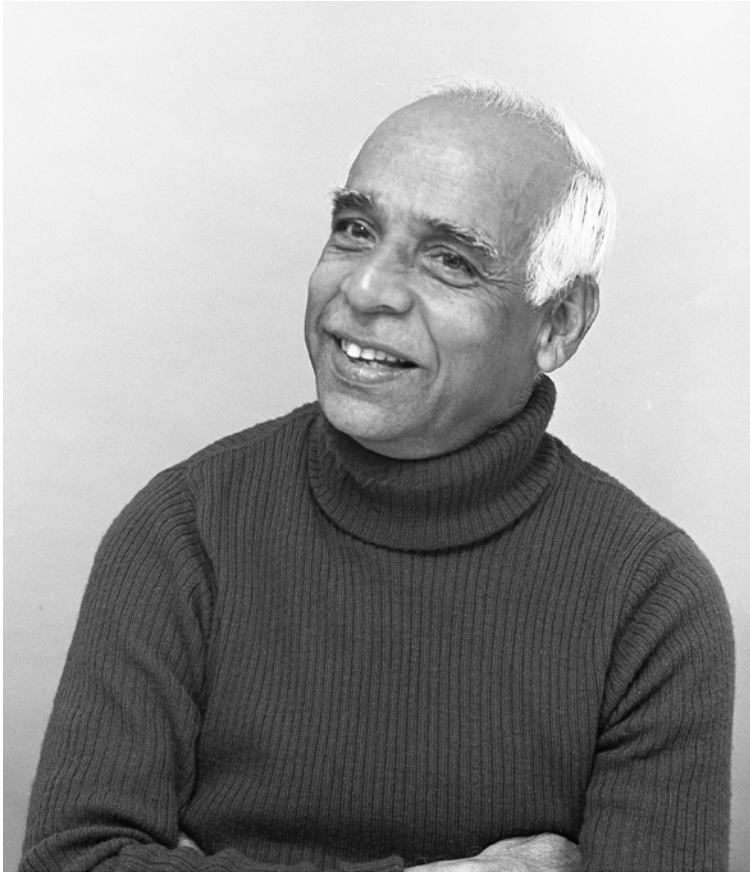
Gradually, if you can bear with this, you will find that you are no longer thinking about “my point of view” and “your point of view.” Instead you say, “There is a point of view that is common to you and me, which we can discover together.” Once you can do this, the quarrel is over. You may not have arrived at a solution – usually, in fact, there is a lot of hard work left to do. But the quarrel itself is over, because now you know that there are two of you playing on the same side against the problem.

Not long ago I was watching the Brazilian athlete Pelé play his last game of soccer. He was retiring at the peak of his career, one of the best soccer players the world has seen, and in this last game he was playing with the New York Cosmos against a team for which he had scored his most memorable goals: Santos of Brazil. For the first half of the game, Pelé played his best for the Cosmos. But the second half had a brilliant touch: he joined his opponents and played his best for them. This is the only way to see the whole.

Unite against the problem

If we could only see the game more clearly – and the results were not so tragic – the spectacle of a quarrel would make us laugh. When we played soccer in my village, one of my cousins used to get so excited that he would shoot the ball into his own goal. We used to say, “Never mind the other side; watch out for Mandan.” But when two people quarrel, that’s just what they are doing – scoring against their own side.

Whatever the disagreement, we are the Home Team, the Cosmos – all of us. Our problems, whether personal or national or environmental, are the Visitors. And the mystics say simply, “Support your team. There is the opponent, down at the other



Easwaran, early 1970s.

end of the field. Unite against the problem; don't go scrapping among yourselves."

Otherwise, if I may say so, there are no winners in this game. Once we divide against ourselves, whether at home or between races or nations, there can only be losers. On the other hand, there is no disagreement so serious that it cannot be set right if both sides can join hands and work hard for a common solution.

It is not at all easy, and the results will not be immediate. But wherever there is hatred, complete love can be established; wherever there is conflict, complete unity can be established. The choice is up to us.

Be at our best always

Jesus puts it perfectly: "Love your enemies." You will never see any loftier words, but never any more practical either, for he is telling us how to rise to our highest stature. Look at the sun, he says; does it shine only on those it likes? It shines on all, it gives to all; and we should learn to love the way the sun shines, without favor or interruption. "Bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you." In time they may learn to love you, but that is not the point. What we are called on to do is to be at our best always.

There is room for great artistry in this – especially when it is not on a grand scale, as it was for Gandhi, but in the everyday life of home and work. Here, I think, there is no better example than St. Thérèse of Lisieux:

In our community there is a Sister who has a talent for displeasing me in everything – her ways, her words, her character seem to me very disagreeable. However, she is a holy Sister whom the good Lord must find quite agreeable.

So, not wanting to give in to the natural antipathy I was feeling, I told myself that charity must consist not in sentiments but in action.

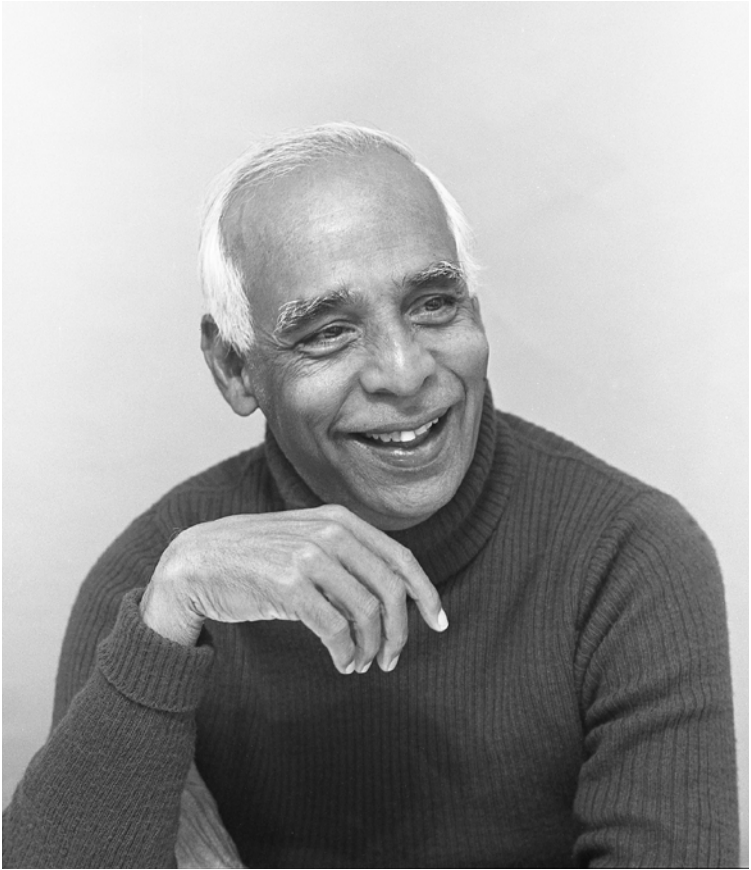
Then I applied myself to do for this Sister just what I would do for the person I love most . . . I tried to render her every possible service, and when I was tempted to answer her in a disagreeable way, I contented myself with giving her my friendliest smile and tried to change the subject . . .

As she was absolutely ignorant of how I felt for her . . . she told me one day with a contented air, almost in these very words: “Would you tell me, Sister Thérèse, what attracts you so much towards me? Each time you see me I see you smiling.”

Ah! What attracts me is Jesus, hidden in the depths of her soul – Jesus who makes sweet that which is most bitter. . . I answered that I was smiling because I was pleased to see her. (Of course, I didn’t add that it was from the spiritual point of view!)

In a small way, this is something that every sincere spiritual aspirant must go through in order to learn to love. In my own life, I too had to deal with people who disliked me – and I have to confess, I did not care for them either. But as meditation deepened, I began to understand: that was the challenge of it. As Jesus asks, “Where is the achievement in loving those who like you? Anybody can do that.”

If you’re daring, it is a challenge that can appeal deeply. After all, if you really want to play championship tennis, you won’t want to play against people like me. You’ll say, “Put me



Easwaran, early 1970s.

across the net from Chris Evert or Jimmy Connors. Even if I lose, the game is going to be worthwhile.”

Gritting my teeth

Once I got that perspective, I really joined battle with my likes and dislikes where relationships were concerned. If there was someone I had always avoided, who always avoided me, I gritted my teeth and began to try to win him over.

The first few times, my knees were shaking as if somebody had given me a pair of boxing gloves and put me in the ring with Muhammad Ali. And sometimes, at the beginning, I was knocked down.

But I wasn't depressed: even if I hadn't laid a glove on my likes and dislikes, I had made it through the first round. That itself was a triumph and a revelation. I wanted to cheer, to pat my mind on the back and say, “Never mind about winning or losing. At least we know that now we can make a fight of it; we don't have to give up and be knocked out by the very first blow.”

I felt as if all my chains had been broken, and if I had been the uninhibited kind, I would have got up and danced like Zorba the Greek. And after that, if a desire to retaliate or speak harshly came up, I would fight it with all I had.

It hurt. After all, I was a professor of the English language. I knew how to use words, I had a large vocabulary at my disposal, and sometimes all sorts of choice remarks would rush to my tongue and pile up behind my teeth, clamoring to get out. But no matter how much pain it caused, I wouldn't speak until I could make my point in calm, courteous language that would not hurt the person who had hurt me.

I hadn't lost a thing

Sometimes, after a lot of patient effort, I was successful in winning over such people. But sometimes, though I tried my level best, I was not. It was terribly disheartening. At times I was tempted to ask myself, "Wasn't all that effort wasted? All that time you spent with that person, listening to him, walking with him, playing tennis with him, when you could have been reading the Gita?"

But then I looked again. I hadn't lost a thing – and I had made myself so secure that I could flourish in any relationship and never be let down.

"Be ye therefore perfect," Jesus says, "even as thy Father in heaven." That is the goal, nothing less. Why ask if it is possible? It doesn't matter; we can always move towards perfection.

Take stock of your day

In India – I imagine the same is true all over the world – children like to measure their height each year with a little mark on a wall. We can do the same: take a few minutes to take stock of our day and see how we can improve. Don't psychologize or dwell on major failures. Two or three minutes morning or evening should be enough to take a bird's-eye view of landmark events and look for ways in which you can do better on the next day.

When you came to breakfast, were you a little abrupt? Did you get caught up in a silent dialogue with your oatmeal? Make a point of being especially attentive the following day. Was there somebody at work to whom – perhaps unintentionally – you gave a cold shoulder? Next day make it warm. That is all – little things. Life consists of these little things, and it is by putting other people first every day in

a thousand little acts of kindness that we make ourselves
“perfect in love.”

Grasp this great truth

“If you want to know how good a person is,” the mystics say, “ask how much that person loves.” It is a perfect epigram, but I like to turn it around. If you want to test the depth of someone’s love, look at how kind he is, how patient she is – not when things are going smoothly, but in their hours of trial.

A ship isn’t tested in a harbor; it’s tested on the high seas. There are great scientists, artists, philosophers, soldiers, who function well enough when life is with them but go to pieces when the storms begin to blow. And the mystics say, “Set aside the goal of life, set aside meditation; what good is a ship that’s only seaworthy in port?” Look at the daring of a great lover like Gandhiji or St. Teresa. When somebody opposes them, instead of running away, they move closer; when someone is angry with them, they try all the harder to be kind.

Not to be provoked, not to be frightened, not to retaliate requires a lot of stability inside so that these passing storms do not upset us. But if we grasp this great truth – that the Lord lives in each and every one of us, regardless of who we are – we will never be discourteous to others, we will never be unkind, we will never try to avoid people, we will always be glad to work in harmony with those around us. Then it becomes impossible to quarrel, to be angry, to hurt others, to move away.

Not diluting your principles

This doesn’t mean weakening your convictions or diluting your principles. Disagreeing without being disagreeable is one of the arts of civilized living. If we really believe what we believe,

we will not be shaken when someone challenges it. Gandhi was an excellent example of this. It is said that he was at his best when he was criticized; it made him even more respectful and compassionate, and made him reach deeper into himself to find new ways of answering.

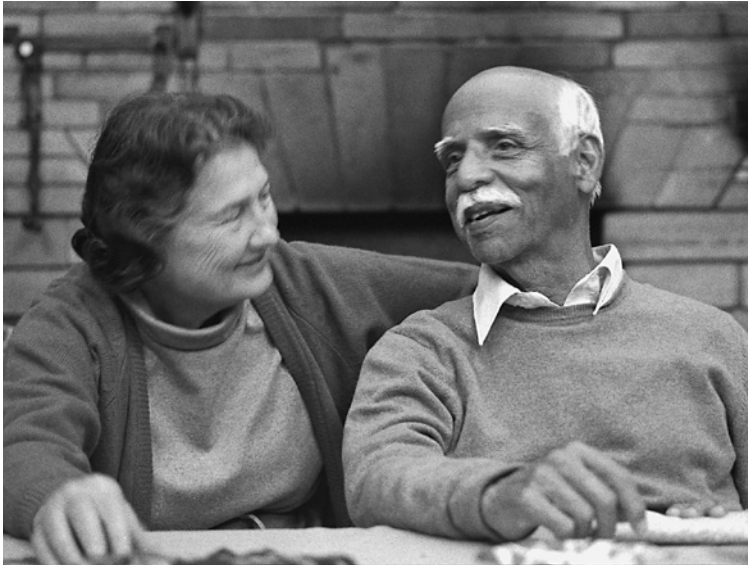
I try to practice that in all kinds of little ways. Every day, for example, I look at a very influential newspaper whose editorial viewpoint contradicts everything I stand for. And I enjoy it: the writing is often excellent, and the differences in perspective help me to understand opinions I would otherwise never hear. I can give full attention to opposite opinions, and learn from them, because my faith in spiritual values is unshakable.

The reason for this, of course, is that these are not just my values. They are timeless, and my faith in them comes from many centuries of experience. If somebody challenges what I say about heaven being within, I don't get upset. It is Jesus who said it, and he is quite capable of defending his words himself.

Rooted in wisdom, rooted in love

I feel very deeply, but I never use an unkind word. I have very strong convictions, but I never express them in language that would be harmful. When you have faith in your convictions, you won't get angry. I can listen to opposition with sympathy, and yet I will stand by my own convictions whatever the opposition is.

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



Easwaran and Christine at dinner, Ramagiri, 1989.

Nothing we do could have a more beneficial influence on those around us than remaining calm and considerate in the midst of ups and downs. It's a challenging career that lasts a lifetime, and there are opportunities every day. 🌸



Ramagiri Ashram.

Her Heart Is Full of Joy

St. Teresa of Avila

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

COMMUNITY STORIES

Polar opposite views – and unity

Back in March, as we learned of Covid-19 and were told to stay home, I asked myself how I could engage in selfless service without leaving the house. I regularly meditate on a passage from St. Teresa of Avila which includes the lines:

“She lives not for herself, but lives to serve the Lord of Love in all . . .”

I wanted to live by these words. I was still employed and had a full schedule, but I knew there was more I could do. I vowed to myself that each week I would call my mother and father, who are divorced and both live alone.

Frequent calls

At first it was very easy, I would ask how they were, whether they were being careful, and how they were coping with the pandemic. With my mom, I would listen more than talk, as she had many things to share. Since her husband had recently passed away, she was lonely and appreciated my frequent calls.

I talked with my father about old times and how he was getting through long days of isolation, which included heavy doses of talk radio and old detective TV shows. In turn, he asked about my work life and family. I enjoyed our interchanges, which were often lighthearted.

Our conversations turned tense

Then the election started heating up. My father and I not only supported different political candidates; we disagreed about almost every major political issue. We each felt that the other had lost touch with reality, and that if the other's candidate won the election, the country was headed for ruin. He told me that I had no idea what was best for our country.

Some of our conversations turned tense, as we tried to convince each other of the wisdom of our positions. I started to hesitate before calling him. But each morning I sat and meditated on the timeless wisdom passed on by the mystics.

I continued to call my mother and father every week, and sometimes twice a week. My father and I had moments of verbal sparring, especially as the election neared, but somehow we ended up laughing and wishing each other and our candidates well.

Focus on what we share

My spiritual practice enabled me to focus on what my father and I share, and to overlook, and even make light of, our differences. By focusing on these commonalities, I was able to treat him with love and kindness, and he did the same.

Putting our views aside

Although the election is over, we continue to have polar opposite political views but choose to put them aside. Just today, as I took a break from my work and treated myself to a walk and some sunshine, my father and I chatted and laughed, sharing how much we love one another. I'm glad I kept calling!

— Margaret, passage meditator, Colorado

Whatever the outcome, nothing is lost

My eight-point practice has helped me hugely in my relationships, but as Easwaran tells us, sometimes in spite of our best efforts we never manage to win a particular person over.

So it was with my next-door neighbor. We needed essential building work on our property and did our best to talk through potential problems with her, but we never got the relationship onto a good footing. I did my best to stay respectful and friendly, but then some new issue would emerge and we'd be back where we started.

She's moved on now. But I can see what Easwaran means when he says our efforts are never wasted. I learned to be a bit more secure, to have more compassion. That's helping me now in other contexts. When we try to live in unity, whatever the external outcome, nothing is lost.

— A passage meditator, US



A view from Ramagiri Ashram.

COMMUNITY STORY

Standing by my values

I work as a Retirement Plan Consultant, which takes me across the Midwest to train company managers and employees. During these travels, I find myself on major highways passing those dreaded semi-trucks with the open metal slats carrying precious cargo of cows, pigs and chickens. The slat openings are just large enough to see sorrowful sets of eyes peering back. Those eyes break my heart, since I know where they are headed. I have been a vegetarian for many years because of those trucks and those eyes. And also because of my beloved cat, Mr. Friend.

My job and my principles

One day on a work call, my boss informed my colleagues and me that we would be required to assist with employee meetings for an important new client with several locations throughout the United States. The new client ran slaughterhouses. The meetings would be at a slaughterhouse.

I felt completely sick to my stomach. These meetings were pitched as a job requirement. But how would I ever be able to go to a slaughterhouse – the place where those sorrowful eyes ended up? I have a strong work ethic, and I need my job, but my heart screamed NO!

Finding my strength

Agonizing between keeping my job and my principles, I brought up the matter with my satsang. They were supportive and compassionate. Ultimately, I had to make a decision.

I decided (after many a mantram) to stand with my values, regardless of the employment outcome. I contacted my manager and let him know that I couldn't work with a slaughterhouse. Fortunately, he was understanding and I didn't lose my position.

I'm grateful for standing strong and the choice I made with the support of the eight-point program and satsang as I was able to find my strength during the storm.

— A passage meditator, Ohio



Nine Ways to Work in Unity

Eknath Easwaran

1 We each have our contribution to make

Everything we do should be judged by how much it adds to the unity of life. This applies to jobs, to recreation, to everything we spend our time on. If it conduces to unity, that work is spiritual.

There is no conflict between what Christian mystics call the active and the contemplative lives, between meditation and selfless action; they go together as naturally as breathing out and breathing in. “What a person takes in by contemplation,” Eckhart says, “he pours forth in love.”

Today our troubled world is clamoring for action from each of us to help resolve the dilemmas with which it is faced.

Without being the president of the country or the prime minister, even in our own small life, in our home, with our neighbors, on our campus, in our town, all of us can make a real contribution to peace by not being violent under any circumstances and learning to live in harmony even with those who may cause trouble to us.

Of course, everyone does not make the same kind of contribution. But whatever our place in life, each of us has a contribution to make that can be made by no one else.

2 Work with concentration and detachment

How we work is as important as what we do. Spiritual values are not so much taught as caught, from the lives of those who embody them. Your job may be nothing more glamorous than janitor in a hospital, but if you are practicing sadhana sincerely,

you will be contributing to other people's lives, even though you may not see it happening. These are spiritual laws.

I have friends who have come back from a stay in the hospital and told me that the person who gave them the most support and cheerful encouragement was an aide who was particularly thoughtful, or the night nurse who always had a smile and something cheerful to say.

We can each enrich our sadhana and improve our contribution to the world by giving the utmost concentration to the job at hand in a spirit of detachment. Both these are necessary: concentration and detachment. When they are present together, it is enough to go on giving our best in fulfilling the responsibilities with which we are entrusted.

3 Be prepared to do work we dislike

There is no job without some drudgery, conflicts, unpleasantness, and a certain amount of plain slogging to get the work done. Therefore, the Gita says, don't ask, "Is this interesting? Is this exciting?" If a job is exciting today, it's going to be depressing later.

The answer is not to change jobs, drop out, or walk away, but to give more attention and do the very best we can. Interest does not lie in the job; it is a function of the attention we give. With complete attention, everything in life becomes fresh.

Ask if you are part of work that benefits people. If you are, give it your best. Doing a routine job well, with concentration, is the greatest challenge I can imagine. You're not just doing a job but learning a skill: the skill of improving concentration, which pays rich dividends in every aspect of life.

4 Make time for selfless service

Even if our paying job does not make much of a contribution, there are many opportunities for selfless service where we can offer our time, energy, skills, and enthusiasm to a cause bigger than ourselves.

I know earnest meditators who will give their best at work for eight hours, then come home and give their time and skills and energy to their family, or their neighbors, or their meditation center, or the local hospital, or any of a hundred and one other worthy causes. When you do, you will be able to say, “My real work starts when business hours are over.”

Those with some degree of spiritual wisdom do not retire from life when they retire from their job. They say, “Now is my chance! I don’t have to go to just one office any more; I can go wherever I’m needed.”

5 Work without personal motives

Some of us may contribute our time; for others it may be energy or skills. For still others it may be material possessions or expert advice. But it’s not enough just to give generously. We also have to work selflessly, trying to give without a trace of egoism or personal motives. We have to work together harmoniously without trying to see who is going to be the leader or to bend others to our will and ways.

In attending to the task at hand, the Gita urges us never to get attached to personal pleasure or profit. Whatever the job, do it as a service to others. Don’t do it to gain credit or prestige or to win attention.

To most of us today, excellence without personal ambition seems a contradiction. From the Gita’s perspective, however,

you can't have one and keep the other.

The key word here is “personal.” I am terribly ambitious where the world is concerned, but I would suggest that none of us try to be ambitious where our own small self is concerned. If we can forget ourselves and give full attention to the job at hand, we cannot help but excel.

6 Meditation is essential

I do not think it possible for anyone to become completely selfless in action without the practice of meditation. It is rather easy to think that we are living for others and contributing to their welfare, but very often we may not even know what the needs of others are.

All of us have immense resources of love, most of which swirl around our own ego. As long as we are in love with our own ego, dwelling upon ourselves, dreaming about ourselves, it will not be possible for us to love our family or our community.

In order to become aware of the needs of those around us, to become sensitive to the difficulties they face, we must minimize our obsession with ourselves. This requires the discipline of meditation, which enables us gradually to reduce self-will and preoccupation with our private needs.

In meditation, we gradually release this swirling whirlpool into channels of fruitful service which flow towards others. The more we think about ourselves, the less we can love others; the less we think about ourselves, the more we are able to love others. When the great day comes when I forget that most monotonous subject in the world, myself, on that day I am free to love everybody.

7 Learning to work selflessly takes time

To imagine that we are going to learn the secret of selfless action in a few months, or even years, is being a little optimistic. Even sincere philanthropists, who do a lot of good for the world, are sometimes motivated by personal drives.

We all begin the spiritual life with action that is partly egoistic, partly egoless, and none of us need be discouraged when we find in the early days that there is some motive of enlightened self-interest driving us on to action. Without this motive in the beginning, action may be difficult.

It is good to accept this from the first. It takes quite a while for most of us to become fully aware that our welfare is included in the welfare of all and to realize that when we are working for everybody, we are also ensuring our own well-being. What matters is the effort – the mental state behind our action.

8 Work with full effort and right means

The secret of selfless action lies in using right means to achieve a right end, and then not getting anxious over the outcome. We all have to use our judgment, weighing the pros and cons before we select a selfless goal, assessing our capacity thoughtfully, and then selecting the right means. According to the great mystics, wrong means can never bring about a right end and right means can never fail to bring about a right end. This is why Gandhi has said, “Full effort is full victory.”

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.

I know of no other way to transform consciousness than the sustained, systematic practice of meditation and its ancillary disciplines. Until we make this commitment, the Gita says, the decisions of life “are many-branched and endless”; but once we do make this commitment, everything begins to fall into place. When we practice meditation regularly and follow the allied disciplines to the very best of our ability, we have only to do our best; the opportunities we need for spiritual growth cannot help but come when the time is right.

If we give ourselves wholeheartedly to selfless work without any desire for recognition or praise, power or remuneration, then our actions cannot help bearing good fruit – not only in the world but in our own lives, in our spiritual growth.

9 Selfless service is a wonderful gift to give

Selfless service brings out what is best in all of us. Below all the conditioned strata of the desire for profit and pleasure flows a deep river of love, a deep desire to give without thought of return.

When we start living for others, we come to life. All our deeper capacities flow into our hands; our security increases and our wisdom grows, as does our creative ability to solve the problems that confront the world. Living and acting selflessly, we will be constantly aware that all life is one – that all men are brothers, as Gandhi would say – and that throughout creation there is an underlying unity binding us all together.

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 be able to give. 🌸

COMMUNITY STORY

Doing my best without worrying

My partner and I moved in 2019 to 10 acres on the outskirts of a town in Northern California. We had long anticipated having a quiet place where we could enjoy nature, but we also knew that we were moving into the Wildland Urban Interface, where the threat of a catastrophic fire seems worse every year.

I wanted and needed to find opportunities to be of service in our new community. Soon after we moved, I saw a call for volunteers for our local Firewise Community, a neighborhood-based group that works with related professional organizations to help neighbors reduce the risk of wildfire and to evacuate safely if needed. The chair called me right back and asked if I would be the leader for the “section” that we live in. Despite my lack of confidence, I felt I couldn’t say no.

Would I be good enough?

Then recently, the chair of the committee asked if I would take over her role while she had major surgery and recovered. Again I did not feel I had the experience compared to others in the group, and there were parts of the job (like leading meetings and contacting people I don’t know) that were difficult for me.

But I want to help and put others first, so I agreed. I realized that what I thought was humility on my part was

actually a form of selfishness. I was worried about not being good enough. The current leader needed help, and she felt I would be a good fit.

The secret of selfless service

As Easwaran says, “The secret of selfless action lies in using right means to achieve a right end, and then not getting anxious over the outcome.” What I really needed (and decided) to do was my best, and the results would take care of themselves. And so far that’s how it has worked!

My volunteer work helped me to examine my motivations and to let go of perfectionism – this is something that I need to work on. And my meditation practice has helped me to take on this role with true humility and detachment.

We are all connected

Working with the Firewise Community has been a really good lesson on living in unity. We are all part of this forest ecosystem and what we do on our own property affects our closest neighbors’ ability to survive a wildfire. The work we do on our shared road affects everyone’s ability to evacuate in case of a wildfire. On a small scale, it reflects how we are living on a shared planet, where ultimately, we are all connected.

— Paige, passage meditator, California

When I Lose Myself in Thee

Tukaram

When thus I lose myself in Thee, my God,
Then do I see, and know,
That all Thy universe reveals Thy beauty,
All living beings, and all lifeless things,
Exist through Thee.

This whole vast world is but the form
In which Thou showest us Thyself,
Is but the voice
In which Thyself Thou speakest unto us.

What need of words?
Come, Master, come,
And fill me wholly with Thyself.



Christine Easwaran.



Easwaran, 1970s.

The Joy of All

Eknath Easwaran

Because the Lord dwells in every one of us, none of us need ever be diffident about our capacity to leave the world a little better than we found it. A story from the folklore of India illustrates this point. On the first day of the sun's creation, people expected to see it shining in the sky forever. No one knew that the sun had to dip into the water in the evening for a twelve-hour bath so that it could rise refreshed in the morning.

So on the first evening of creation, everyone was terrified to see the sun about to set and the darkness beginning to spread across the world. They didn't know what to do. Then one little person stood up and said, "I'll light a candle." Someone else added, "I will too." Here, there, everywhere, millions of people started lighting candles, and soon the whole world was filled with light again.

This simple little story shows the importance of every person on earth. Ordinary though we may be on the surface, within the heart of each of us lie tremendous capacities for love and service, and if we can keep our eyes always on the Lord of Love, there is no problem on earth too dire for ordinary people like you and me to solve.

A beautiful prayer from the ancient Hindu scriptures echoes in my heart always: "May all creatures be happy. May people everywhere live in abiding peace and love."

For all of us are one, and joy can be found only in the joy of all. 🌸



Learn to Meditate in 2021: Instructions in Passage Meditation

Eknath Easwaran

The principle of meditation is simple: we are what we think. When we meditate on inspired words with profound concentration, they have the capacity to sink into our consciousness, alive with a charge of spiritual awareness. Eventually these ideals become an integral part of our personality, which means they will find constant expression in what we do, say, and think.

Half an hour every morning, as early as is convenient, is the best time for meditation. Do not increase this period; if you want to meditate more, have half an hour in the evening also, preferably at the very end of the day.

Set aside a special place to be used only for meditation and spiritual reading. If you cannot spare a room, have a particular corner. Whichever you choose, keep your meditation place clean, well ventilated, and reasonably austere.

Sit in a straight-backed chair or on the floor and gently close your eyes. If you sit on the floor, you may need to support your back lightly against a wall.

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

Once you have closed your eyes, begin to go slowly, in your mind, through one of the passages from the scriptures or the great mystics that I recommend for use in meditation. I usually

suggest learning first the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. As you go through the prayer, let each word sink like a jewel into your consciousness.

While you are meditating, do not follow any association of ideas or try to think about the passage. If you are giving your attention to each word, the meaning cannot help sinking in. When distractions come, do not resist them, but give more attention to the words of the passage. If your mind strays from the passage entirely, bring it back gently to the beginning and start again.

When you reach the end of the passage, you may use it again as necessary to complete your period of meditation until you have memorized others. It is helpful to have a wide variety of passages for meditation, drawn from the world's major spiritual traditions. Each passage should be positive and practical, selected from a major scripture or a mystic of the highest stature. Many beautiful passages selected from the world's great spiritual traditions can be found in my collection *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* and on our website, www.bmcm.org/passages.

Even a little such practice will begin to transform your life, leading to profoundly beneficial changes in yourself and the world around you. 🌸

A New Audiobook of *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*

From the BMCM Press team

Easwaran's classic three-volume commentary, read by actor and passage meditator Paul Bazely, should now be available at Audible.com and Apple Books.

Further Resources for Learning to Meditate and Deepening Your Practice

From the BMCM Programs team

Free Introductory Online Webinars

A chance to try out passage meditation.

www.bmcm.org/programs/introductory-webinar/

Introductory Online Weekend Retreats

Everything you need to get your passage meditation practice started.

www.bmcm.org/programs/introductory-weekend-online/

Passage Meditation – A Complete Spiritual Practice

Easwaran's classic manual, available in print and as an ebook and audiobook.



Our Programs team on BMCM Satsang Live.

BMCM Satsang Live

Our twice-weekly online satsang takes place on Tuesdays from 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. PST and is repeated on

Sundays from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. PST. Find more at

www.bmcm.org/community/bmcm-satsang-live/.

Online Retreats, Webinars, and Workshops January–June 2021

Our new online retreats and programs have become the training ground for those of us who yearn to join Easwaran in making the spiritual renaissance a reality. In the retreats, you will experience turning to your practice, to Easwaran and his teachings, and to a strong spiritual schedule. The retreats combine contemplative activities with practicum times in which you apply your practice directly to your own unique home environment.

Free Introductory Webinars:

January 23, May 15

Setu Half-Week Online Retreats:

January 29–February 2, June 4–8

Weeklong Online Retreats:

February 26–March 3, April 30–May 5

Returnee Weekend Online Retreats:

March 19–21, May 21–23

Introductory Weekend Online Retreat:

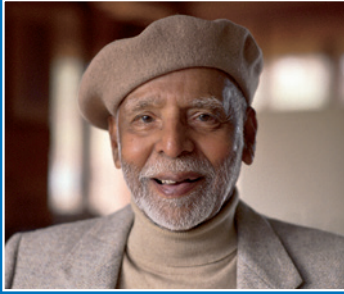
April 16–18

Returnee Online Workshop:

June 19

For more information about upcoming events, including fees and financial aid, visit our website at [www.bmcm.org/ programs](http://www.bmcm.org/programs).

We'd love to have you join us!



When we start living for others, we come to life. All our deeper capacities flow into our hands; our security increases and our wisdom grows, as does our creative ability to solve the problems that confront the world. Living and acting selflessly, we will be constantly aware that all life is one, and that throughout creation there is an underlying unity binding us all together.

— Eknath Easwaran



**Blue Mountain
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