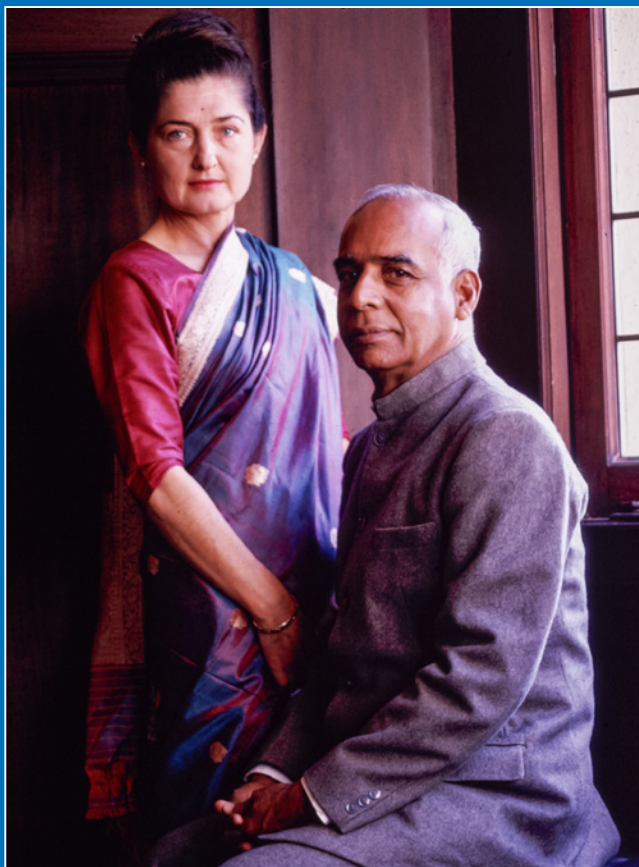


Ekknath Easwaran on Meditation & Spiritual Living

Blue Mountain Journal

FALL 2022



Honoring
Easwaran & Christine

In Loving Memory
of
Christine Easwaran
1921 - 2022



It's not just me and Christine
doing this work together.

There is an indescribable power
behind that pushes me on, gives me
a certain limited choice.

As Gandhiji puts it, I don't have
the wide choice of the sea, but I have
just the choice of rooms on a ship.

It's a very limited choice, but even
within that limited choice we can
make great contributions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'C' that loops back.



Easwaran and Christine, 1960s



The Early Years

Ek Nath Easwaran

I knew my work would start as soon as I reached Berkeley. I spoke to large audiences at the university and to smaller groups around the Bay Area. Many only wanted to read about the spiritual life, but in every audience I found a few with a window open, and that open window would bring them up after the talk to ask practical questions. “Can we learn to do this in America? Can we learn to do this in Berkeley? Can I lead the spiritual life with my family, or do I have to drop out and go to the Himalayas? Can someone like me really attain the vision of God?”

In one such talk, in a bookstore on California Street in San Francisco, I met Christine. She had come to the Bay Area in February 1960 just like me; it took till August for us to find each other.

I had been speaking on the Katha Upanishad and the conquest of death, my perennial theme, and my words went down so well that in a moment of enthusiasm I gave instructions in meditation and said, “Now let us try it.” We all closed our eyes, and in a short time I went deep, deep in. I forgot California Street, forgot San Francisco, forgot everything outside. And when I came out, only three people were in that room: myself, Christine, and the owner of the bookstore, who was waiting impatiently to close.

With the arrival of Christine, most of my problems were solved.

She was my driver, my secretary, my accountant, everything. At that time I had speaking engagements in at least four places around the Bay Area. We consolidated them all in a little place at 1333 Walnut Street in Berkeley – “where Creation began.” I didn’t have any money, Christine didn’t have any money, and naturally everyone advised us to levy some fees. It was tempting, but we resolutely set our face against it. Even if we had to go without food, we would not charge.

For a while we had a difficult time. Christine was working eight hours a day in the city then; she came over after work to prepare my dinner and then drive me to class. But little by little, beginning with Mary, people began to come and help.

We had just got the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation incorporated when I was called back to India in January 1962 to fulfill the terms of the Fulbright. Christine joined me two weeks later, leaving Mary in charge. It took four years for us to return, and all that time it remained unclear just where and how the work of our new meditation center would unfold. Perhaps in some other state, perhaps in Canada; I thought again of England. Perhaps it would even be on the Blue Mountain. Right next to our home lived an English lady who invited us to lead the meditation at a nearby ashram; soon I had a speaking schedule there as busy as in Berkeley.

Those were precious years. We had no worldly responsibilities – no income and no responsibilities. My mother was there, my sister was there, we had no household duties, so we could devote ourselves completely to our spiritual disciplines. We had

long hours of meditation every morning – I wouldn't recommend those hours to anyone today – and after breakfast we must have walked for hours and hours each day repeating the mantram, with another long meditation together in the evening.

And there were memorable instances of what in India is called *darshan*, the blessing of being in the presence of a man or woman who has realized God. We visited Swami Ramdas and received his blessing, and one glorious week at Vrindavan, where the historic Krishna grew up, we were able to visit one of India's greatest woman saints, Sri Anandamayi Ma, who gave her blessing by taking a garland from her own neck and placing it over Christine's.

Most significant for the future, perhaps, was an encounter with some Franciscan friars who had come up to the Blue Mountain for the summer to escape the heat of the plains. They invited me to their monastery to speak, and I looked upon it as an invitation not so much to address them as to kneel before Saint Francis. I was, in their eyes, neither a Catholic nor even a Christian, let alone a Franciscan. But they were deeply responsive, and one night Saint Francis appeared to me in a vision and his grace entered my heart.

Perhaps that is why I chose the prayer of Saint Francis among all the thousands of passages to recommend for meditation. If you can see through the words as I do, I see Francis in that prayer. It is not by him; it *is* him. The proof was that those words came alive in my consciousness and began to shape my life.

When you have driven that prayer deep into your consciousness in meditation, it means that you have become an instrument in the hands of the Lord for peace wherever you live. It is

not a little prayer. It's a kind of blessed bomb that bursts in your consciousness. Once you have this tremendous experience, every deed that you do, every word that you speak, every thought that you think, will have this stamp. That's what a little prayer can do.

Perhaps you can see now that it is not just me and Christine doing this work together. There is an indescribable power behind that pushes us on. It has given me a certain limited choice: to use Gandhiji's image, I don't have the wide choice of the sea, just the choice of rooms on a ship. But even within that limited choice we can make great contributions to the welfare of the world.

All in all, we had almost four full years on the Blue Mountain to devote completely to meditation and the allied disciplines. It was perfect preparation for what lay ahead. I had never had such an opportunity before and we never had it again. For in December 1965, when Sri Krishna must have decided that we were ready for Berkeley and Berkeley was ready for us, the obstacles to our return fell away and we plunged into the maelstrom of this work with Sri Krishna as our ferryman. And I never looked back. 🌸



Easwaran and Christine, 1960s



Easwaran and Christine, 1970s



The Gift of Time

From the Foreword to *Take Your Time*

Christine Easwaran

I had the privilege of knowing someone who had full possession of every moment – all the time there is. And he gave it away freely.

Time isn't a thing, of course. We can't really possess it or give it in the same way as we can give an object. When I say Eknath Easwaran had all the time there is, I mean that he lived completely in the present. Instead of being hurried by time, he was master of it.

When I met him in 1960, soon after his arrival in California as a professor from India on the Fulbright program, Easwaran was full to overflowing with the desire to teach these skills. A born teacher, he had distilled his experience into an eight-point program that he himself followed. In addition to his obligations at the University of California, he had speaking engagements throughout the Bay Area and even some popular lectures on campuses in Southern California.

The schedule was always tight, but he was never in a hurry. Not once, then or since, did I see him pressured into speeding up to get more done in the time available. By his example, he was constantly teaching what he knew from experience: the most effective way to accomplish a lot is to do one thing at a time and do it well.

The first time I remember Easwaran asking me to slow down was on a beautiful autumn afternoon in 1960. I was driving him back to Berkeley from Walnut Creek, where he had given an informal lecture on the philosophy of ancient India to a small but enthusiastic audience. The freeway was new and broad and there was almost no traffic. I had no reason to hurry, but under these conditions it was natural – and fun – to go the speed limit. So it came as a surprise to me when he asked me to slow down – I wasn't exceeding the limit, after all. But I dropped back anyway.

Yet habit is habit and the speedometer gradually worked its way back up.

Then he asked me the second time to slow down. This seemed ridiculous. I felt a little annoyed, as I had as a teenager when I was learning to drive on rural roads in Virginia and my dad would tell me the same thing. But then I remembered. This man is from India, where the pace of life is very slow. Why else would he want to go slow? So I slowed down.

This was my first lesson in slowing down. It took me a long time to understand why I should and much longer to learn how.

In those days, I simply couldn't understand why Easwaran placed so much importance on such matters. I thought it might be cultural. As an American, I took hurry for granted and considered it self-evident that speed means efficiency and faster is better. I soon learned that efficiency comes from complete concentration on one thing at a time, even when one has to manage several tasks. The secret is the unbroken flow of attention that characterizes peak performance.

Easwaran enjoyed watching sports – especially those he understood from playing them, such as tennis and soccer – because he enjoyed the concentration of a champion. I began to see that he too moved with the efficiency and grace of the performers he liked to watch. They understood the “inner game,” he said; they knew the importance of the mind. That was his field, the mind. He wanted everyone to see that this training of the mind is the secret not just of first-rate tennis or ballet but of everything – of what he called the art of living – and that, just as in tennis or ballet, it could be learned. He was, if you like, everyone’s personal trainer in the inner game of living.

The word “slow” is misleading when it implies sluggish. Easwaran was unhurried, but he was never sluggish. In an emergency he could act instantly, before those around him grasped what was happening. When planning was called for, however, he would often slow down like a gymnast poised before bursting into her routine. It was as if physical activity was a distraction at such times; everything important was happening deep inside. (I have read something very similar about Mahatma Gandhi.) Then, suddenly, he would act, still without hurry but with intense precision, setting in motion one by one the things that needed to be done.

Helping others to slow down occupied Easwaran’s attention from the beginning of his career as a spiritual teacher until the end of his life. It was part of a message meant for the world, but nowhere seemed a better platform for delivering it than the United States.

*

Easwaran describes the shock he felt on arriving in New York and seeing first-hand the pace at which Americans were moving. (Even then! Today 1959 seems leisurely.) That first day, he says, he decided never to get caught up in this kind of rat race – and not only that, but to help everyone around him to slow down too. At that point he was still putting the finishing touches on his eight-point program. Two of the points suddenly jumped in importance: slowing down and one-pointed attention, his term for doing one thing at a time with an undivided mind.

At first I don't think anyone listening to him understood why a spiritual teacher should place so much emphasis on anything so commonplace. Today it's clear that he was seeing what lay in store for our society if the pressures to hurry were not reduced. Thoughts are seeds, he explained; if cultivated, they have to grow into action and bear fruit with the passage of time. America was sowing the seeds of hurry; the fruit to come was all too clear.

*

I said that hurry was Easwaran's first concern on arriving in the US. It stayed with him to the end. In 1998, while he was in chronic pain, Easwaran agreed to give a talk at a local community college on a topic of his choice. In those days he rarely left home; when he did, it was only for a quiet drive. Nearing the end of his life, he had been giving all his time to retreat participants and close students, training those who would carry on after him.

Clearly this would be his last opportunity to address a wide audience. A topic of the utmost seriousness was called for. What



Easwaran and Christine, 1970s

did he want his message to be? Would he speak on meditation? Some theme from world mysticism? Mahatma Gandhi?

He chose to talk about slowing down. And he chose to use most of the time simply to tell stories, slipping in his characteristic touches of practical wisdom almost as asides.

*

An unhurried mind opens a door to discoveries in every moment. We don't have to change the circumstances around us; we simply need a mind that is quiet, calm, and kind.

I warmly invite you to step aside from the hurry around us, take your time, and let this gifted teacher help you discover a doorway to joy and serenity where most of us never think to look: in the ordinary activities of our everyday lives. 🌸



Wise Choices Every Day

Eknath Easwaran

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.

The Buddha called this "living intentionally." It is a way of life. Slowing down is not the goal; it is the means to an end. The goal is living in freedom – freedom from the pressures of hurry, from the distractions that fragment our time and creativity and love. Ultimately, it means living at the deepest level of our awareness.

An unhurried mind brings the capacity to make wise choices every day – choices of how we use our time, of where we place our resources and our love. I am not just talking about avoiding the rat race, but about a life full of an artistic beauty – a life that



Easwaran and Christine, 1970s

has almost vanished from modern civilization, but is quite within the reach of everyone.

In this, I believe, we do more than simply elevate our own personal lives. We begin to remake our civilization. We can begin to transform our global jungle into a real global village, where our children will remember naturally the needs of all the children on the face of the earth. This is our destiny. This is what we were all born for and what we have been looking for all of our lives, whatever else we have been seeking. 🌸



Ramagiri Ashram

Invocation

Rig Veda

Let us meet together.

Let us talk together.

May our minds have common understanding.

May our actions bear fruit together.

May we share our thoughts and intentions.

May we have common aspirations.

Let there be harmony among us.

Prayer for Peace

Swami Omkar

Adorable presence,
Thou who art within and without,
 above and below and all around,
Thou who art interpenetrating
 every cell of my being,
Thou who art the eye of my eyes,
 the ear of my ears,
 the heart of my heart,
 the mind of my mind,
 the breath of my breath,
 the life of my life,
 the soul of my soul,
Bless us, dear God, to be aware of thy presence
 now and here.

May we all be aware of thy presence
 in the East and the West,
 in the North and the South.
May peace and goodwill abide among individuals,
 communities, and nations.
This is my earnest prayer.

May peace be unto all!



A Daily Rhythm

Christine Easwaran

We can “improve our contribution to the world simply by giving complete attention to the job at hand,” Eknath Easwaran tells us. To achieve this complete attention (especially in our practice of his eight-point program of passage meditation) it is important that a congenial daily schedule become a habit. He tells us in *Passage Meditation* that “with practice, a schedule will become a reflex.”

*

In his memorable essay “Habit,” William James pointed out in the nineteenth century the benefits of establishing a routine. He wrote that “the more details of our daily life we can hand over to the effortless custody of automation” – habit – “the more our higher powers of mind will be set free for their own proper work.”

Easwaran adds to this by saying, “To live in harmony with the laws of life” – higher powers – “we need to observe the rhythm of night and day by going to sleep as early as possible at night and getting up as early as possible in the morning.”

This daily pattern connects us with the rhythm of Nature – the rising and setting sun, the tides, recurring seasons of growth and decay, which repeat themselves endlessly. We begin to sense our place in the universe, and our higher consciousness expands when these routine activities are under control. Easwaran tells us, “We are surrounded by creative powers, as surrounded as we are by air and light and gravitation.” Allying ourselves with these



Easwaran and Christine, 1970s

profound creative forces is our aim in meditation.

In these frantic times, all of us – as individuals, families, and communities – stand to benefit from the stability and bonding that a practical daily routine can generate. A schedule will test our self-will, but it will help us stick to the practice of Easwaran’s method of meditation, uniting us in subtle ways with all those around the world who are following this path with us. 🌸



A Regular Practice

Eknath Easwaran

To make progress in meditation, you must be regular in your practice of it. Some people catch fire at the beginning, but when the novelty wears off in a few days and the hard work sets in, their fires dampen and go out. They cut back, postpone, make excuses, perhaps feel guilty and apologetic. This is precisely where our determination is tested, where we can ask ourselves, “Do I really want to get over my problems? Do I want to claim my birthright of joy, love, and peace of mind? Do I want to discover the meaning of life and of my own life?”

There is only one failure in meditation: the failure to meditate faithfully. A Hindu proverb says, “Miss one morning, and you need seven to make it up.” Or as Saint John of the Cross expressed it, “He who interrupts the course of his spiritual exercises and prayer is like a man who allows a bird to escape from his hand; he can hardly catch it again.”

Put your meditation first and everything else second; you will find, for one thing, that it enriches everything else. Even if you are on a jet or in a sickbed, don't let that come in the way of your practice. If you are harassed by personal anxieties, it is all the more important to have your meditation; it will release the resources you need to solve the problems at hand.

To make progress in meditation, we have to be not only systematic but sincere too. Success comes to those who keep

at it – walking when they cannot run, crawling when they cannot walk, never saying “No, I can’t do this,” but always “I’ll keep trying.”

Have you heard the expression “heroes at the beginning”? All enthusiasm for the first few days, but then . . . Not long ago I watched the news coverage of the annual Bay to Breakers run, from one side of San Francisco to the other. Some fifteen thousand people showed up to participate . . . brand new color-coordinated outfits, top-rated running shoes, digital stopwatches, everything you could want for a serious race. And what enthusiasm at the start! Everyone bouncing along with jaunty, springing steps, grinning at the spectators, scanning the competition for an attractive face . . . this is the life!

The next morning, though, I read about the aftermath. Fifteen thousand may have started, but thousands never finished. Sure, at the beginning, everything feels fine. But out around Hayes Street – after the downtown traffic, the noise, the fumes – a lot of people begin to think twice. The pavement is hot . . . and so are those top-rated running shoes. Hills are coming up, and the attractive face that refreshed your eyes has disappeared over the next rise. Up ahead a billboard asks, “Wouldn’t a nice cold beer taste good right now?” Next thing you know, you’re sitting on a stool at Roy’s Recovery Room, watching the end of the pack trudge along and thinking, “Next year . . .”

It helps to know at the outset that you will be running a marathon in this program, not simply jogging once or twice around a track. It is good to be enthusiastic when you sit down for meditation the first morning; but it is essential to be equally enthusiastic, equally sincere, at the end of the first week, and the end of the first month, and for all the months to come. 🌸



BMCM offices at Ramagiri

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.



Seeing Ourselves as We Really Are

Christine Easwaran

Eknath Easwaran often quoted Patanjali, the meditation teacher of ancient India, in saying that the goal of meditation is to see ourselves as we really are, or, in Christian terms, to find our original goodness.

In the first phase of meditation, we discover we are not the body. In the second phase, we discover we are not the mind. In the third stage, we discover our universal nature or, we might say, the unity of all life. This is summed up by Shankara, the great eighth-century saint born in Easwaran's old state of Kerala, who sang,

I have no form or fancy, the all-pervading am I.
Everywhere I exist, yet I am beyond the senses.
I am pure knowledge and bliss.

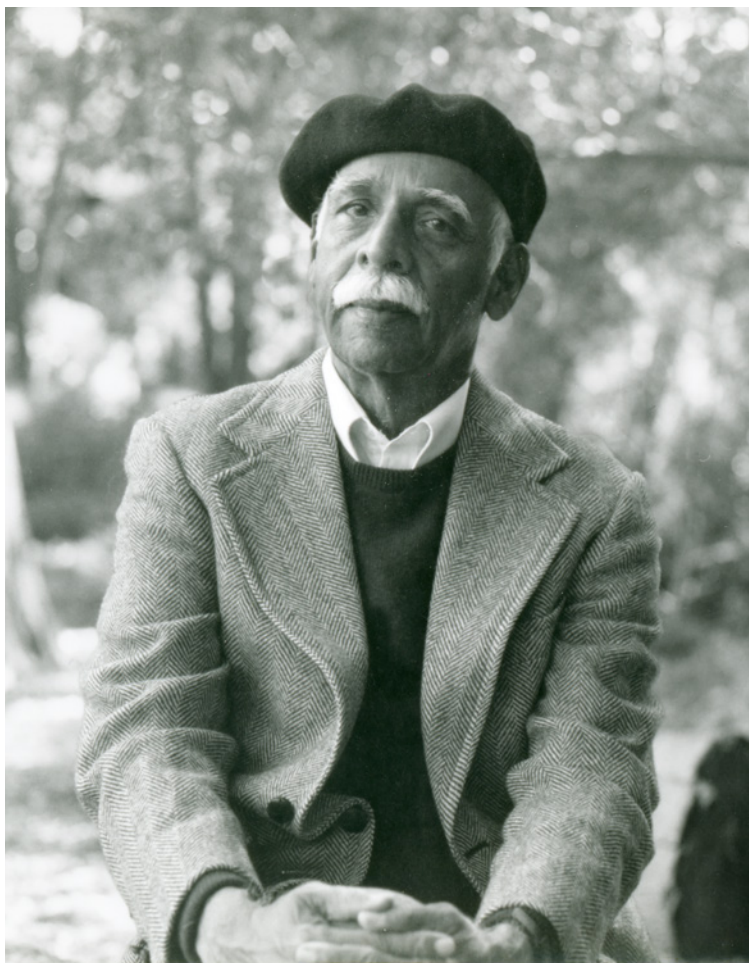
All along the way, as the mind comes under control through regular, systematic meditation, we receive great benefits in health and well-being. But the goal is not reached until we see the Lord within every creature, as revealed by Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita:

Who sees the Lord within every creature
Deathlessly dwelling amidst the mortal:
That one sees truly. Thus ever aware of the
Omnipresent always about him
Hides the face of God beneath ego no longer:
Therefore he reaches that bliss which is highest.



Easwaran and Christine, 1970s

This is the unitive state, the goal of meditation, the climax of evolution. Though we may be tiny specks in the cosmos now, we are not insignificant. To shift metaphors and return to Meister Eckhart, we are God-seeds being nourished by meditation. 🌸



Easwaran, 1980s



The Spark in the Soul

Eknath Easwaran

I have spoken at times of a light in the soul, a light that is uncreated and uncreatable . . . to the extent that we can deny ourselves and turn away from created things, we shall find our unity and blessing in that little spark in the soul, which neither space nor time touches. – *Meister Eckhart*

These words, addressed to ordinary people in a quiet German-speaking town almost seven hundred years ago, testify to a discovery about the nature of the human spirit as revolutionary as Einstein's theories about the nature of the universe. If truly understood, that discovery would transform the world we live in at least as radically as Einstein's theories changed the world of science.

Meister or "Master" Eckhart – the title attests to his scholarship, but seems to fit even better his spiritual authority – lived almost exactly at the same time and for the same span as Dante, and both seem born to those lofty regions of the spirit that do not belong to any particular culture, religion, or age but are universal. Yet, also like Dante, Eckhart expressed perfectly something essential about his times.

The end of the thirteenth century was a period of intense turmoil in Europe, and the Rhine valley, where Eckhart was born,

was the breeding ground of various popular religious societies which alarmed conventional Christians. Yet a God who could be known personally and a path by which to reach him were what an increasing number of people yearned for, and Eckhart's passionate sermons, straining to convey the divine in the words of the street and marketplace, became immensely popular.

And what did he teach? Essentially, four principles that would later be called the Perennial Philosophy, because they have been taught from age to age in culture after culture:

First, there is a "light in the soul that is uncreated and uncreatable": unconditioned, universal, deathless; in religious language, a divine core of personality which cannot be separated from God. As St. Catherine of Genoa put it, "My me is God: nor do I know my selfhood except in God." In Indian mysticism this divine core is called simply *Atman*, "the Self."

Second, this divine essence can be realized. It is not an abstraction, and it need not – Eckhart would say must not – remain hidden under the covering of our everyday personality. It can and should be discovered, so that its presence becomes a reality in daily life.

Third, this discovery is life's real and highest goal. Our supreme purpose in life is not to make a fortune, nor to pursue pleasure, nor to write our name on history, but to discover this spark of the divine that is in our hearts.

Last, when we realize this goal, we discover simultaneously that the divinity within ourselves is one and the same in all – all individuals, all creatures, all of life.

Words can certainly be ambiguous with ideas such as these, and “mysticism” is no exception. In my teaching, a mystic is one who not only espouses these principles of the Perennial Philosophy but lives them, whose every action reflects the wisdom and selfless love that are the hallmark of one who has made this supreme discovery. Such a person has made the divine a reality in every moment of life, and that reality shines through whatever he or she may do or say – and that is the real test. It is not occult fancies or visions or esoteric discourses that mark the mystic, but an unbroken awareness of the presence of God in all creatures.

The signs are clear: unflinching compassion, fearlessness, equanimity, and the unshakable knowledge, based on direct, personal experience, that all the treasures and pleasures of this world together are worth nothing if one has not found the uncreated light at the center of the soul.

These are demanding criteria, and few people in the history of the world can be said to have met them. I often refer to these men and women collectively as “the great mystics,” not to obscure their differences, but to emphasize this tremendous undercurrent of the spirit that keeps resurfacing from age to age to remind us of our real legacy as human beings.

On this legacy the mystics are unanimous. Nothing can change that original goodness. Whatever mistakes we have made in the past, whatever problems we may have in the present, in every one of us this “uncreated spark in the soul” remains untouched, ever pure, ever perfect. Even if we try with all our might to douse or hide it, it is always ready to set our personality ablaze with light.

*

Whatever our religious beliefs – or even if formalized religion is anathema – it is possible for every one of us to uncover the core of goodness of which Eckhart speaks. It has nothing to do with theology and everything to do with practice. In other words, what we say we believe in is not so important; what matters is what we actually do – and, even more, what we actually are. “As we think in our hearts, so we are.” Goodness is in us; our job is simply to get deep into our consciousness and begin removing what stands in the way.

Doing this, however, is no small task. I would go to the extent of saying that there is no way to accomplish this today except through the systematic practice of meditation.

How can I make such a sweeping statement? Because I mean something very particular and practical by the word “meditation.” Although it is a spiritual discipline, meditation stands above the differences that define the world’s great religions. Meditation is not dogma or doctrine or metaphysics; it is a powerful tool. Just as everyone can use a shovel, everyone can use meditation to dig into consciousness and change it to conform with her highest ideals.

“There is no greater valor nor no sterner fight,” attests Eckhart. As always, Eckhart is terse and to the point: because “he who would be what he ought to be must stop being what he is.”

That is the challenge of the spiritual life – and that challenge is part of its appeal. It is precisely because the quest to realize God is so difficult that those who are really daring – and there are many in this country – should be eager to take it up. In fact, the



Easwaran and Christine at Ramagiri Ashram, 1970s

mystics say, all the daring and aggressiveness in human nature are given to us for one supreme evolutionary purpose: to remove what covers our original goodness so that we can reveal more and more of the divine in our own lives. 🌸



Shanti meditation hall at Ramagiri Ashram

Do Not Look with Fear

Saint Francis de Sales

Do not look with fear

on the changes and chances of this life;
rather look to them with full faith that as they arise,
God – whose you are – will deliver you out of them.

He has kept you hitherto.

Do not but hold fast to His dear hand,
and He will lead you safely through all things;
and when you cannot stand, He will bear you
in His arms.

Do not anticipate what will happen tomorrow.

The same everlasting Father who cares for you today
will take care of you tomorrow and every day.

Either He will shield you from suffering or
He will give you unfailing strength to bear it.

Be at peace, then, and put aside all anxious thoughts
and imaginations.



The Promise of Death

Christine Easwaran

For as long as I have known him, Easwaran considered death the most urgent question in life, for it puts everything into perspective. “Young or old,” he told us, “none of us has much time. It’s all over so soon! There is no time to be selfish, no time to quarrel, no time to put off discovering for ourselves who we are and what life is for. The body, which is physical, has to obey physical laws, but we are not the body. We are the Self, the Atman, the divine spark within, which does not die when the body dies. This is the message of all the world’s great religions.”

To make this message a living reality is the purpose of spiritual disciplines. Whatever we may say, all of us behave as if we were physical creatures that can be satisfied with material things and sensory experiences. Easwaran’s eight-point program of passage meditation enables us gradually to cut the ties of attachment to the body so we can find the immortality of the soul.

Easwaran often said that it is not enough to face death with courage; what is important is to face death with understanding: the deep comprehension, not in the head but in the heart, of what he called “the promise of death.” With this understanding, when the body can no longer function, death can come as a friend. Dying is not the end of the story, but only the end of one chapter in the long adventure of our lives, and what comes next is determined by this chapter and how it ends.

This brings every day into perspective. Every moment becomes a precious opportunity to learn not to identify ourselves with the physical body and its needs and satisfactions, but with the qualities of the spirit that make us human – love, compassion, kindness, wisdom, understanding – which can grow in strength even when the body is in decline.

One of the most significant features of meditating on passages from the scriptures and mystics of all religions is that it drives these healing words deep into consciousness, where they begin to reshape how we think and live. Easwaran often quoted Carl Jung’s observation that in the depths of consciousness of all of us, whatever we think on the surface, there lurks the fear of death.

Many of the passages in *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* reverberate with the power to replace that fear with the unshakable certitude that our real Self is beyond all change and death. When we read them slowly and carefully, reflect on them, write them out, memorize them, meditate on them with profound concentration, they come alive with the charge of mystical awareness that first drew them forth.

To practice this kind of deep reading, sit down in a quiet place where you can concentrate fully. Choose a passage – we have included some selections in this issue – and read it through slowly. Close your eyes and reflect on what you have read. Are there any words or phrases that seem especially significant to you? Read the passage through again. You may proceed a page at a time, a paragraph, or even line by line. If you wish, you might jot down a few notes about how the inspired words affect your life and how you might put them into practice.

Passages like these give us a glimpse of the eternal Reality that does not change when the body changes or die when the body dies. 🌸



Ramagiri Ashram

Be Aware of Me Always

Selections from the Bhagavad Gita

Make every act an offering to me;
Regard me as your only protector.
Make every thought an offering to me;
Meditate on me always.

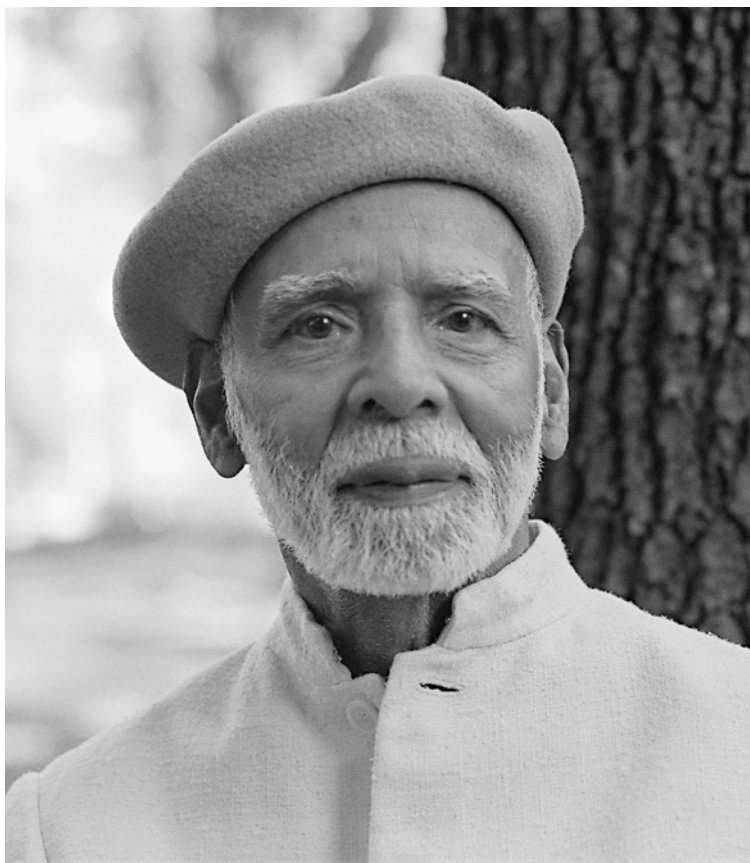
The Lord dwells in the hearts of all creatures,
And he whirls them round on the wheel of time.
Run to him for refuge with all your strength
And peace profound will be yours through his grace.

I give you these precious words of wisdom;
Reflect on them and then choose what is best.
These are the last words I shall speak to you,
Dear one, for your spiritual fulfillment.

Be aware of me always, adore me,
Make every act an offering to me,
And you shall come to me;
This I promise, for you are dear to me.

Leave all other support, and look to me
For protection. I shall purify you
From the sins of the past. Do not grieve.

For the full version of this passage, see bmcm.org/passages.



Easwaran, 1990s



The Lesson of the Lilac

Ekmath Easwaran

Outside my window there is a lilac bush which I see every morning at breakfast. A month ago I had only to open the window to smell its heady perfume, and for two or three weeks it was in opulent blossom. Then one day I looked out and noticed that the delicate flowers had turned brown. Their fragrance no longer filled the air. How quickly it was over! For me it wasn't a lesson in gardening. It was a very personal message telling me, "Let these lilacs remind you that all things flourish and then fade."

Nothing in life is more pressing than learning to face death. If we could live for a thousand years, there would be no urgency in this lesson. We could devote a hundred years to making money, and when this failed to bring us happiness we would still have plenty of time. We could devote another hundred years to attaining fame and another hundred to pursuing the pleasures of the senses, and when we had carefully explored all these blind alleys, we would still have the time and the vitality to change our direction and look for the source of lasting security and joy that is within each of us. But the tragedy is that we have very little time to make this discovery.

I once read a story about a man who kept putting off life's deeper questions in order to have just one more fling, to make just one more deal. Time after time he told himself that next week, or next month, or next year, he would change his life.

Then, one night, he dreamed that he was dying. There was no chance now to change his direction. Time had run out on him, and all his plans for making a new start in life could never be fulfilled. It was a terrifying experience, and as he struggled to wake up, he vowed passionately not to postpone for a single morning more. But when he tried to sit up, he found it was no dream; he *was* on his deathbed.

It is a sobering story. Most of us have a tendency to postpone in just this way. Once we have finished painting the kitchen, we say, once we have finished our dissertation, once we have paid off our loan, then we will have time to devote ourselves to what is really important. But when the kitchen has been painted and the dissertation has been turned in, there will still be letters to write, checkbooks to balance, garages to clean, places to go and people to see. So the Buddhist mystic Milarepa advises, “The affairs of business will drag on forever. Do not delay the search for truth.”

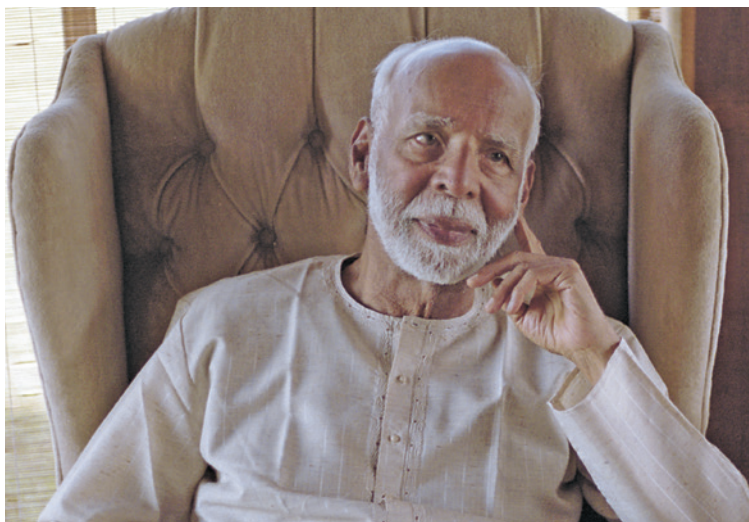
*

When the alarm clock is ringing, when a voice inside is saying, “You know you’re not getting any younger,” the last thing to do is to pull the blankets up over our heads and try to fall asleep again. But most of us seem to want to sleep on as long as we can. Our response to the body’s aches and pains, to the little wrinkles and gray hairs, is to try to hide them and pretend they are not there. We take a couple of aspirin, smooth on more cosmetics, double our dosage of vitamin E, distract ourselves with travel or social life or some new sport, as if by not thinking about it we could escape death’s notice forever.

*

The spiritual teachers of all religions remind us that at this very minute the messengers of death are on their way with a letter for each of us. This letter was posted the day we were born, and we never know when it will arrive. For some the letter takes a long time to reach its destination; for others it comes by special delivery at midnight. It shocks us to hear about the sudden death of a friend in an auto accident, just as it shocks us to hear that someone has a terminal illness with only two or three years to live. But the truth is that the body is mortal, and whether it lasts five years or fifty is only a matter of degree.

This whole universe is a theater of death. Everything that has been created is in the process of passing away. For the monsoon moth it is a matter of hours; towards the other end of the scale there is the sun, which has been blazing away in the sky for much longer than there has been life on our earth. It is difficult to imagine that the sun has not been around forever. Yet like us, our sun has a kind of birthday too. He was born some six billion years ago out of contracting clouds of gas, and though he seems fit enough now – just right to sustain life on earth – he has already entered middle age. Gradually the vital fusion fires at his core are going to cool and then flare up erratically as he swells into a “red giant,” a lethargic solar Falstaff with a middle-age bulge that engulfs the earth. After another ten billion years, when his temperature drops for the last time, he will explode in a final display of solar dramatics or suddenly begin to contract and cool until he is no more than another cold cinder floating in space.



Easwaran, 1990s

*

The miracle that all the world's great religions affirm is that you and I can break out of this cycle of birth and death once and for all. My spiritual teacher, my grandmother, had her own ways of teaching me this when I was still quite small. I was always an enthusiastic student, and because I loved my granny very much, I used to run home every day to tell her what I had learned. And every day she would be waiting for me right by the front gate. Once, however, I must have come home with gloom showing on my face, because Granny immediately asked what was the matter. "Bad news, Granny," I said. "Today in geography our teacher told us that compared to the universe, you and I are no more than specks of dust."

Granny was a simple village woman, but she was never one to be intimidated by book-learning. She laughed and took me by the hand. “Look,” she said, pointing up at the sky. “Even that sun is going to burn out someday and pass away. But you and I, because the Lord lives in us, can never die.”

Of course, the body must wear out and fall away someday; no one would deny it. But you and I are not the body. As the Sufi mystic Abu Hamid al-Ghazali avowed in a little poem composed on his deathbed:

When my friends weep over my dead body,
Ask them, “Do you mistake him to be this?”
Tell them I swear in the name of the Lord
That this dead body is not I. It was
My garment while I lived on earth;
I wore it during my stay there.

In my youth I did not understand this attitude toward death, but today, because of many years of spiritual disciplines, I have learned not to identify myself with what is changing. I have a brown jacket with a Nehru collar, made in India, which I take very good care of. I expect it to last me for many more years, but when it is no longer presentable I am going to give it away without any feelings of regret. It has served me well, but it is in the nature of a jacket to wear out. Similarly, this body of mine is another brown jacket made in India – it has the label of its Maker right inside. I take good care of it too, but when the time comes, I will be able to take it off without any break in consciousness.

*

At the time of death, the Hindu scriptures say, the soul does not depart from the body suddenly. It takes its jackets off step by step. There is a gradual withdrawal of consciousness from the senses into the mind and then from the mind into the Self. Only then does the Self depart.

First, the doors of the senses shut completely, and external awareness of the body and of our surroundings is gone. At this stage, the dying person ceases to hear or see anything in the external world because consciousness has been withdrawn from the ears and the eyes. Yet even though there is no experience of external sensations, there is still consciousness in the mind, with all its desires and regrets, all its conflicts and hopes and fears.

At this point there is no longer a surface level of consciousness; there are no random thoughts. The content of our consciousness will be whatever we have dwelt upon most, whatever we have worked hardest for, whatever we have desired most intensely. And when the Self departs from the body, it is this core of consciousness that accompanies it into the next life. That is why the Upanishads say:

We are what our deep, driving desire is.

As our deep, driving desire is, so is our will.

As our will is, so is our deed.

As our deed is, so is our destiny.

What occupies our consciousness at the moment of death, therefore, is of the utmost importance. In India a scripture like



Easwaran and Christine, 1990s

the Bhagavad Gita is read aloud while a person is dying, so that something of its message will be with that person in his or her final moments. Very much the same thing is done in other major religions. Even more effective in this critical transition is for the dying person to repeat the mantram over and over in the mind.

The mantram is always a powerful ally, and it is especially comforting at the time of death. When I have had occasion to sit by the side of someone who is dying, I just repeat my mantram silently. There is no need to talk at such times; simply holding that person's hand and repeating the mantram, especially when there is a bond of love between you, can help a great deal to calm the turbulence that may overtake the mind at the time of death.

This is the advice that the great mystics of all religious traditions have given us: to call upon God at the time of death. Whatever mantram we use, we are calling upon a power not without but within. The Lord is not a figure in a distant galaxy, but a divine presence that abides in our hearts as our real Self.

For most people, the onset of death precipitates a terrible sense of deprivation. All the attachments we have formed over a lifetime, all our cravings for sensory experience, tie us to the body. Then, when death comes, there is a terrible struggle when it tears us away – and the harder we cling, the more it will hurt.

My grandmother had a vivid way of getting this point across. Once, as a child, I asked her why death should involve so much suffering. She didn't answer; she just told me to sit in one of our big wooden chairs and hold on with all my strength. Then she tried to pull me out of the chair. I held on for all I was worth, but

my granny was a strong woman, and with one painful wrench she had me on my feet. “That hurt!” I said.

“Now sit down again,” she said, “but this time don’t hold on.” I did as she said, and there was no struggle, no pain; she raised me gently into her arms.

This is the secret of facing death. When death comes and growls that our time has come, we just say, “You don’t have to growl. I’m ready to come on my own.” Then we take off the jacket that is the body, hand it over carefully, and go to our real home.

*

Even ordinary people like you and me can face our last hours with understanding and courage if we practice spiritual disciplines with real earnestness. If we begin now to repeat the mantram, and repeat it whenever we get an opportunity, it will be there when we need it even in the turmoil of the body’s final hours. Even though our repetition may seem mechanical to begin with, if we practice meditation earnestly and support our meditation with a program of spiritual living, the mantram will enable us to go deeper and deeper into our consciousness. Practice is the important thing, and sustained enthusiasm. The mantram is the raft to carry us across the sea of death to the other shore.

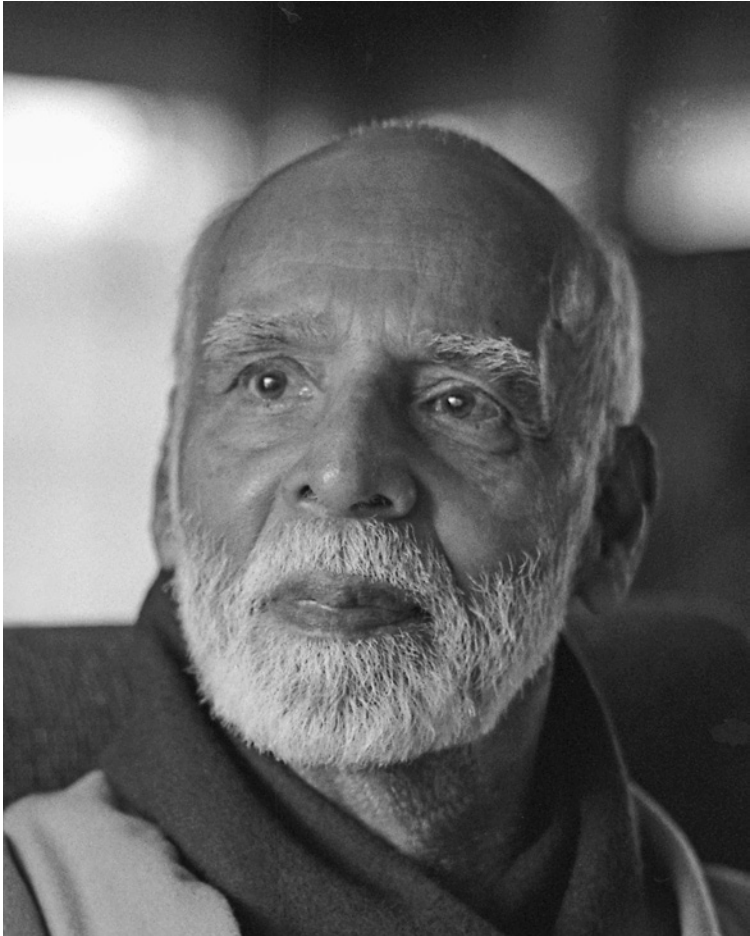
Together, meditation and the mantram can establish us in the state of spiritual awareness. Once we realize God, we are united with him forever. Our constant awareness of the unity of life, our constant awareness of the divine presence within, is not interrupted even when the physical body falls away. Sri Krishna gives us this promise in the Bhagavad Gita:

. . . they for whom I am the goal supreme,
Who do all work renouncing self for me
And meditate on me with single-hearted
Devotion, these will I swiftly rescue
From the fragment's cycle of birth and death
To fullness of eternal life in me.

This is what Jesus means when he promises us life everlasting: “Verily, verily I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.”

In my early years in this country, though many earnest men and women came regularly to my talks on meditation, I don't think they paid much attention to what I said about immortality. That death is not inevitable, that it can be conquered, and that this conquest has to be achieved here in this life – these are things beyond all reason, beyond the imagination, beyond any mundane possibility.

When spiritual teachers say that going beyond time means going beyond death, we usually think they are speaking figuratively. Very few of us are prepared to accept that this means immortality as *immortality*: a literal, attainable state. Yet our love of adventure, our capacity for daring, our rebelliousness, and our passions can all be rechanneled to release within us the extraordinary energy required to realize immortality here and now. 🌸



Easwaran, 1990s



The memorial rock at Ramagiri Ashram

A Garden Beyond Paradise

Jalaluddin Rumi

Everything you see has its roots
 in the Unseen world.
The forms may change,
 yet the essence remains the same.

Every wondrous sight will vanish,
Every sweet word will fade.
 But do not be disheartened,
The Source they come from is eternal –
Growing, branching out,
 giving new life and new joy.

Why do you weep? –
That Source is within you,
And this whole world
 is springing up from it.

The Source is full,
Its waters are ever-flowing;
 Do not grieve,
 drink your fill!
Don't think it will ever run dry –
This is the endless Ocean!

*For the full version of this passage,
see bmcm.org/passages.*



Eternal Forces

Easwaran told us once that he tried to imagine how the ashram and his work and all the thousands of his friends would be affected when he passed on and in what ways he could continue to guide us when he was no longer with us in the physical body.

He mentioned the saints and added, “They are not dead. Their bodies are gone, but they move about freely in the world, helping those who turn to them with a unified heart. They are eternal forces; their lives are eternal.

“My grandmother is not present physically, but she is more present in my heart now than when she was alive on earth. Similarly, don’t ever make the mistake that I am confined to this brown body. I am not. I am in every one of you.”

Very often now our friends tell us that when they are intently absorbed in Easwaran’s talks or books, answers to their deepest questions come to them.

May this be your experience too.

Christine Easwaran



Easwaran and Christine, 1990s



Honoring Christine Easwaran













Setu Prayer

Dear Lord, please fill my heart
with love and devotion for you
and burn out all seeds of selfish desire
and sense craving in my mind.

Grant that I may be carried by you
from this life to the next without suffering
and be born in a holy family
with my heart overflowing
with love and devotion for you
from earliest childhood onwards







Together, meditation and the mantram can establish us in the state of spiritual awareness. Once we realize God, we are united with him forever.

Our constant awareness of the unity of life, our constant awareness of the divine presence within, is not interrupted even when the physical body falls away.

— Eknath Easwaran

2022, Volume 33, No. 2

© 2022 by The Blue Mountain Center of Meditation

P.O. Box 256, Tomales, CA 94971

info@bmcmm.org, www.bmcmm.org, 707. 878. 2369

To read previous issues of the *Blue Mountain Journal*, see www.bmcmm.org/journal.

To sign up for a free subscription, see www.bmcmm.org/subscribe.

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

Excerpts by Christine Easwaran are from the Foreword to *Take Your Time* and from previous issues of the *Blue Mountain Journal*.