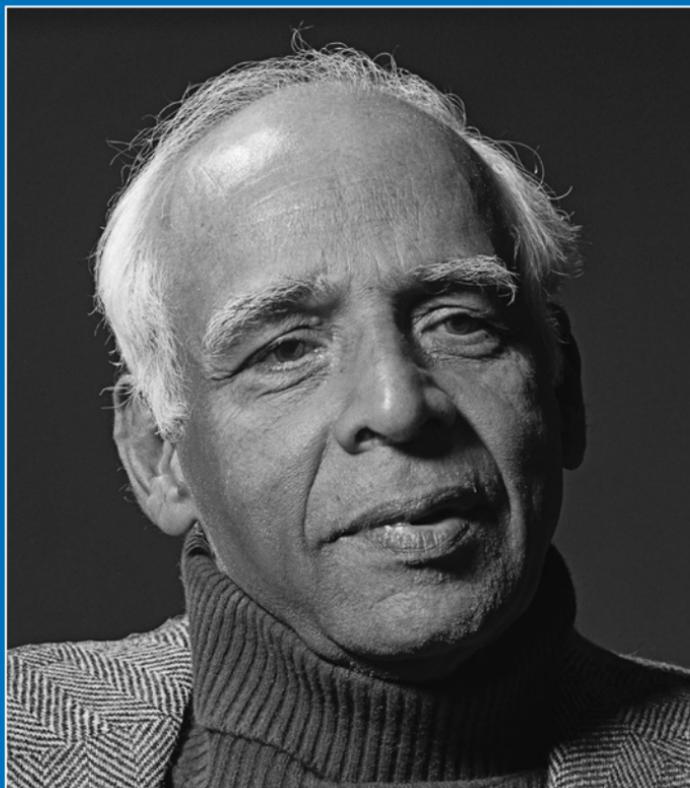


Ekknath Easwaran on Meditation & Spiritual Living

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Discrimination
Making Wise Choices

In This Issue

“To grow spiritually,” Easwaran writes, “we need both the detachment to see clearly and the discrimination to know what is of lasting value – and, of course, the willpower and determination to put our insight into action.” After exploring detachment in the last journal, we now focus on discrimination, the ability to make wise choices.

Such choices arise moment by moment, as noted in the first article, between that which pleases and that which serves the long-term good. The second article provides guidelines for choosing the latter, while the third discusses the crucial need for discrimination in entertainment and other mass media. Finally, Easwaran applies these principles to the world stage, explaining how discrimination can remedy crises that threaten our very survival. These principles are further illustrated in reader stories and reminders from Easwaran.

By learning to discriminate between what is permanent and what is passing, each of us can contribute to our own well-being and that of the world. – The BMCM Editorial Team

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What Is Really Important?

Eknath Easwaran, from *Words to Live By*

The greatest source of danger to a human being is loss of discrimination, and this is the main malady in our modern civilization, where we have lost our capacity to differentiate between what is necessary and useful, and what is unnecessary and harmful.

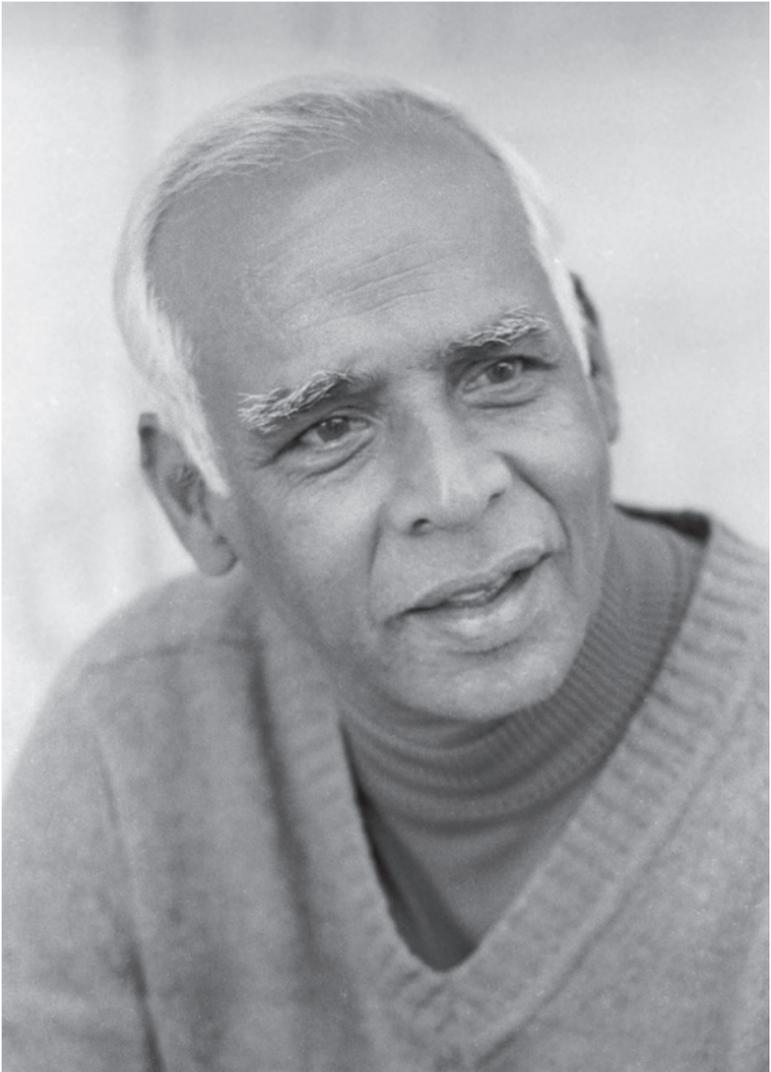
How often do we stop and ask, “What is really important? What matters most to me?”

If every one of us starts asking this simple question, it will transform our daily lives and even the world in which we live. After all, we need clean air and water more than we need microwave ovens. Doing work that is meaningful and of service to others is more important than owning luxury cars. We need loving human relationships more than we need home entertainment systems.

Many modern conveniences make life more pleasant and can save time. We needn't live without them, but when we begin to think such things are not merely useful but prized possessions, we may gradually lose our discrimination.

In order to understand what is important in life, what our real priorities are, discrimination is essential.





Easwaran, early 1970s

A Choice in Every Moment

Eknath Easwaran, from *Conquest of Mind*

During my days as a professor of English literature, one writer with whom I felt a special kinship was Gilbert Keith Chesterton. Not only did he do keen studies of favorites of mine such as Robert Browning and Charles Dickens, but he wrote a fascinating portrait of Saint Francis of Assisi which shows that Chesterton had some personal grounding in matters of the spirit. You can see this even in those rattling good detective stories he gave us, featuring the redoubtable Father Brown.

On one occasion, the story goes, friends of Chesterton's were complaining that people today have nothing to believe in. "The real problem," Chesterton replied, "is that when you don't have something to believe in, you will believe in anything at all."

Something more meaningful

This is our great contemporary tragedy. If something is presented seductively, if it appeals to our society's carefully cultivated taste for profit or pleasure, most of us will believe in anything that comes along. Millions of people of all ages and occupations, out of intentions which for the most part could not be called wrong, are entangled in activities that in the long run will injure their health, impair their peace of mind, inflict suffering on their families, darken their prospects, and eventually threaten the very life of our society – all because, in the depths of their hearts, they lack something to believe

in that is loftier and more meaningful than personal pleasure and profit.

Contrast this picture with the scene five thousand years ago on the banks of the Ganges. The sages of ancient India used to pray every morning as the tropical sun rose in glory:

*Ya atmada balada yasya vishva
upasate prashisham yasya devah*

“To that radiant Being, who gives life and strength, I offer all my desires, all that I am.”

This shining Being within is what gives meaning to life. Nothing in the world of change outside us can provide the abiding purpose that we seek. “He is the source of my strength, my very self,” this prayer implies; “so I owe my life to him. Everything I do, everything I desire, everything I am, should go to serve him in the rest of his creation.” Understanding this gives purpose to life; practicing this brings fulfillment.

Discover the Gardener

Sanskrit describes this core of divinity as *satyam*, *shivam*, *sundaram*: the source of truth, of goodness, and of beauty. The seas surge with the flow of his love; the mountains reflect his glory. All the loveliness we see in nature is his. Yet although we may admire the beauties of his garden, the mystics say, very few of us actually seek to discover the Gardener, who dwells in the heart of every creature.

Different religions use different names for this aspect of divinity which is the very core of our being: Krishna, Christ, the

Buddha, Allah, the Divine Mother. But the reality referred to is one and the same. In Sanskrit the term is simple and universal: Atman, the Self, radiant, loving, immortal, infinite, who is the same in all beings, in all creatures, in all of life.

The law of life

“The soul has two eyes,” says Meister Eckhart: “one looking inwards and the other looking outwards. It is the inner eye of the soul that looks into essence and takes being directly from God.” It is because we do not know how to look to this shining Being inside us that we try to light up our dim lives from outside in any way we can. Not knowing how to turn inward, we look for meaning and fulfillment in the fickle realm of sensory experience.

Those who are sensitive to what goes on inside them know how much of this effort is generated by a nagging sense of desperation, of emptiness within. Such is the nature of the human being, such is our very constitution, that we have to have a purpose greater than the endless struggle to satisfy personal desires. We have to believe in something more lasting than creature comforts. Otherwise we will eventually feel driven to do anything, try anything, to find fulfillment – as Chesterton implies, to do anything at all.

We need, in short, a central force to hold us together; otherwise we fly apart, pursuing our separate goals. The Sanskrit word for this force is one of the oldest and most meaningful in the Upanishads: *dharma*, “law,” the law of unity, that life is one indivisible whole. The Buddha did not talk about

God; he said simply, “*Esa dhammo sanatano*”: the fact that all of us are one and indivisible is an eternal law. Unity is the very law of life. In that law lies our growth; in it lies our future; in it lies our fulfillment. And today, in the world of medicine, we are discovering that in unity also lies our health, our longevity, our vitality. When we live just for ourselves, we are stunting our own growth and courting illness. It is in living for all that we rise to our full potential of vibrant, vital, creative action.

Of lasting value

Much of the art of living, then, rests on the rare ability to discriminate between what is in harmony with this central law of life and what violates it. To act wisely, we must see clearly. “Does this particular choice bring me closer to my partner or my family? Does it resolve a conflict, foster clean air, bring peace to my mind or to people around me?” If the answer to such questions is yes, that course of action is in harmony with the unity of life. If the answer is no, then it is not, however pleasant it may be.

To grow spiritually, we need both the detachment to see clearly and the discrimination to know what is of lasting value – and, of course, the willpower and determination to put our insight into action. Discrimination is the third of my three Ds, and it flows directly from the second, detachment. Discrimination is pure, detached love in action.

Without discrimination, by contrast, “anything goes.” The only basis for choice is personal conditioning – likes and dislikes. One of the grimmest warnings in the Sanskrit

scriptures states, “Lack of discrimination is the source of the greatest danger”: to health, to security, to personal relations, to life itself.

Despite its tremendous achievements, one of my quarrels with modern industrial civilization is that it is so lacking in discrimination that we cannot see how our choices and values are violating the unity of life. In focusing on manipulating the world outside us, we have lost sight of the world within; yet only there can we find meaning, purpose, and value.

Preya or shreya?

In daily living, discrimination means making wise choices: knowing what to do and what not to do, not so much in moral terms as in terms of where our choices lead. One of the most stirring of the Sanskrit scriptures, the Katha Upanishad, uses two marvelous words to help us see which course of action will lead to trouble in the long run and which will lead to detached, loving living. I say “marvelous” because these words apply to every choice, in every circumstance, so they dispel the haze that often surrounds a difficult situation.

Wherever you have a choice, ask yourself this question: “Which is *preya*, that which pleases, and which is *shreya*, the long-term good?”

Preya is what we like, what pleases us, what offers immediate gratification to senses, feelings, or self-will. *Shreya* is simply what works out best in the end. *Preya* is the pleasure principle: doing what feels good, whatever the consequences. *Shreya* means choosing the best consequences whether it feels

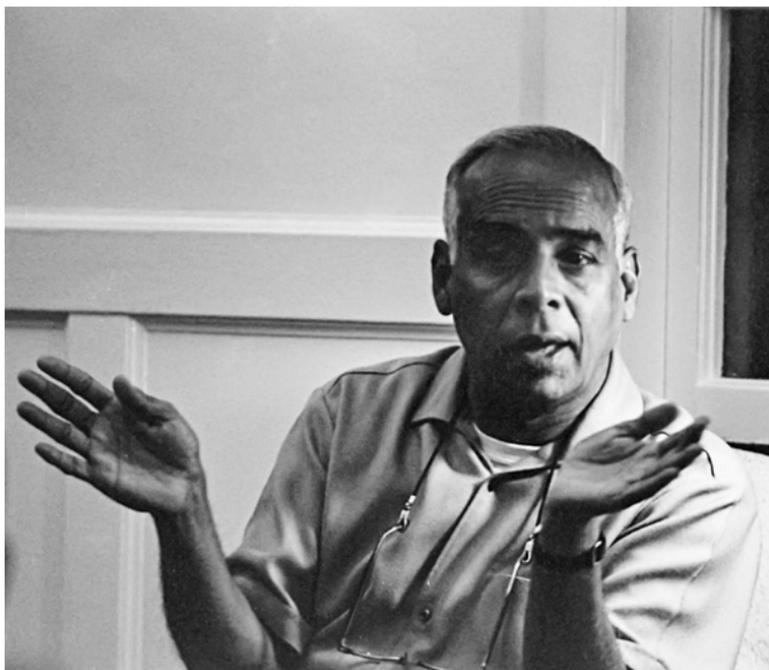
good or not, often forgoing a temporary pleasure for the sake of a lasting benefit.

Junk food is one of the clearest illustrations of preya: sugar, salt, and saturated fat, so fast and easy that you don't even have to sit down for it. The consequences are equally clear. Or look at exercise: "no pain, no gain." Training and toning the body often is not pleasant. We do it for the sake of its long-range benefits because later we will really feel good in a deeper, longer lasting, more satisfying way. That is shreya, choosing what is best.

Choices everywhere

When we learn how to look for it, we see that this choice between preya and shreya comes up every moment, in virtually everything we do. There is no escaping it. The moment dawn breaks, the choices begin: "Shall I get up for my meditation, or shall I pull the blanket over my head and stay in bed a little longer?" It starts there, and it goes on until you fall asleep at night.

Early morning, therefore, have your meditation right on time. It sets the tone for the rest of the day. The Bhagavad Gita, in a verse that is etched on my heart, assures us that regular meditation will protect us from life's gravest dangers. "*Svalpam apyasya dharmasya trayate mahato bhayat*": even a little meditation will guard you against the greatest fears – against physical ailments, emotional problems, disrupted relationships, spiritual alienation. Most critical, perhaps, meditation slowly opens our eyes and hearts to the needs of



Easwaran, 1960s

those around us. That is discrimination, and I know of no better protection against the mistaken choices that can so burden life with guilt and regret.

After meditation, of course, more choices come in a hurry, generally at the breakfast table. With all the conditioning of the media, where eating is concerned, right choices are not easy. Food has become a kind of religion, and business is quick to cash in on it. To choose wisely, your senses must listen to you. That is the essential prerequisite. And for your senses to listen to you, your mind must listen to you. That is why, as you train

your mind in meditation, your eating habits come under your control. Likes and dislikes begin to change, and choices open up everywhere.

Yet discrimination, of course, extends not only to eating but to everything. In the Sanskrit scriptures, we are said to eat through all the senses. Just as we learn to be discriminating about what we put into our mouths, we learn to be vigilant about the books and magazines we read, the movies and television we absorb, the conversation we indulge in, the company we keep: in short, in everything we do and say. Ultimately this extends even to what we think. We have a choice in all these things; that is what is meant by intentional living.

What we put into our minds

Let me illustrate with reading. Having spent the first half of my life in the world of books, I can speak about them with some authority. There was even a time when I thought the Lord could be found in the lower stacks of the library. That was a phase I had to go through, being a university man. Today, because I am involved in publishing, I still look at bookstore shelves and book-trade journals with great interest. But I have to confess that I see very few books worth reading; and when I look at some of the magazines and tabloids on display in supermarkets, I envy my grandmother her illiteracy. It has come to such a pass.

Even where highly recommended books are concerned, we have to be exceedingly judicious about what we put into

our minds. The fact that a book has become a bestseller is no guarantee of quality. I am not talking about morality now but simply about the effect on the mind.

When you are training a puppy, you don't try to teach it limits for an hour and then say, "All right, you're off duty now. Go do whatever you like for the rest of the day." It is the same with training the mind. Why spend half an hour every morning in meditation, going through the agony of teaching an unruly mind to be calm and clear, and then go out and stir up all its appetites again in the name of relaxation?

We are being drugged

Some years ago, a man who honestly thought he was doing people a service wrote a best-selling book on sex. The subtitle might well have been "A Guide to Disrupted Relationships and a Bloated Ego." His theme was simple: "Your needs come first. Don't hesitate to impose them on others; everybody will be happier for it." When has this ever worked? Anybody who takes this kind of advice seriously is going to become more lonely, more frustrated, and more estranged.

Physical appetites can never be satisfied for long; the more we want, the less they can be fulfilled. Gradually the mind becomes unruly in everything, and other people become things that either please or hinder us. Then, where two people sincerely sought love, they find only anger, bitterness, and regret. Yet the books and magazines and movies go on promising: satisfaction lies in sex, and it's just around the corner; just try again . . .

Many years ago, for the Fulbright orientation program,

I spent a beautiful summer month at the University of Kansas, where I visited the home of a colleague who had a twelve- or thirteen-year-old daughter. In the course of the evening I got acquainted with the girl and said, "Let's see what you are reading." After looking over the row of books piled up on her desk for the summer vacation, I went privately to her father, just as I would have done in India. "Do you know what kind of books your daughter is reading?" I asked.

"Oh, sure," he said casually, as if amused by my provincial Indian attitude. "This is a free country, you know."

I had already heard this a few times before. "By the way," I said, "I notice you lock the bathroom cabinet. Is that an American custom?"

"No," he laughed. "That's where we keep dangerous drugs, so the kids don't get into them."

"There are drugs that injure the body," I said, "and there are books that injure the mind."

To him, I suppose, this must have sounded censorious. But just as a physician understands what drugs can do to the body, I understand what sense impressions and potent images do to the mind. That is my field. It disturbs me deeply that most of our children have little guidance in what goes into their minds, and I will tell you why. In our area we have a popular daily that boasts on its masthead, "Sex and Crime." Every day a big dose of both is offered. When this is poured in over and over again, this is what we are going to think about. We are being drugged, and no street drug is more addictive.

*

Turn to the mystical tradition

There are many good books available today, not only the time-tested classics but good stories by contemporary authors, and no end of books that explore science and culture in ways young people can understand. I have seen children coming to ask for such books. They won't be content with the cheap substitutes our mass media try to force down their minds.

But we need to set them a good example with our own reading too. There you can do no better than to turn to the mystical tradition. It is a whole world of beautiful literature, inspiring, practical, nourishing, strengthening. These are words that have endured the passage of centuries. In the Hindu tradition we have magnificent epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which cannot be surpassed for drama, adventure, character, and spiritual insight. Most Hindu children grow up on these stories, which offer noble role models and teach the basic laws of life in the midst of high entertainment.

Every spiritual tradition has its literature, full of poetry and the passionate desire to communicate what words cannot contain, where men and women who have soared to the heights of human experience try to convey to us what they have discovered and what they encountered along the way.

What brings lasting benefit

Every day, in everything, we have a choice. Nobody can say, "I'm not free to choose." Those two words from the Upanishads can always help us see our choices clearly: *preya*, that which



Easwaran, 1960s

is pleasant but probably benefits nobody, even ourselves; and *shreya*, that which is of lasting benefit to all. Shall I reply curtly to her rude remark, or shall I speak kindly? Shall I spend the afternoon doing something I like, or shall I work at something that helps a few others? Everywhere we have choices like these, and discrimination comes when we start choosing what brings lasting benefit even at the cost of a few private, personal satisfactions.

As you start doing this, you will feel the chains of conditioning on your wrists and ankles slowly falling away. 🌸

COMMUNITY STORIES

Detachment and Discrimination

I have worked with some small and mid-sized organizations in the last few years in administrative and consulting capacities. In one situation an organization had significant financial challenges. I initially worked to get detailed information to understand organization policies regarding all expense types and verify the appropriateness of allocations of these expenditures. I provided the organization with preliminary reports of all verified information, that showed significant discrepancies in standard accounting from the records they were willing to share.

During this time meetings were scheduled and canceled. Many reports were promised but not delivered. I worked with a variety of personnel across the organization – all very capable and nice people. I made repeated requests, always thanking staff for what had been provided, always making my request with courtesy and understanding. After several months, I made a final request to reconcile a set of budgets but not receiving the information had to conclude that reports would not be forthcoming.

Throughout this effort, by remaining detached, I had remained calm, respectful and thoughtful of everyone involved. In sharing the results of my work, I took into account that people were doing their best in a difficult situation. They did not feel they had options. I offered additional assistance.

Even though I was requesting basic information – facts – I had felt strongly the need to “work in harmony,” always seeking to understand. I considered the positions of those involved and encouraged them to consider one another. Being guided by Easwaran’s teaching, my work was not only about financial practices and reporting, it was clearly about detachment and discrimination. Thank you, Easwaran.

— a member of our Affiliate Program

The Mantram and a Calm Ultimatum

At a time when my wife and I were dealing with our wayward son Howie, just having finished his first year in college and intent on spending a summer of fun and games in the Big Apple, we knew it was ultimatum time.

“You mean I can’t go to college at all if I don’t stay home and get a summer job?” said Howie. In responding, I knew we could shout it out or go for that still mind, as Sri Easwaran had been talking and writing about for years. The choice was ours.

So, as I began to feel the panic dissipate in my heart and *Rama Rama Rama* take over, my wife – she doesn’t meditate – must have heard it too subconsciously, for we responded in unison to Howie, “Yes, we do mean that.”

I am certain to this day that it was the calmness and soft tone we used that convinced Howie we meant business. Howie stayed home that summer, got a job, and resumed his studies at college the following Fall.

— a longtime passage meditator, California

Eight Reminders for Living Wisely

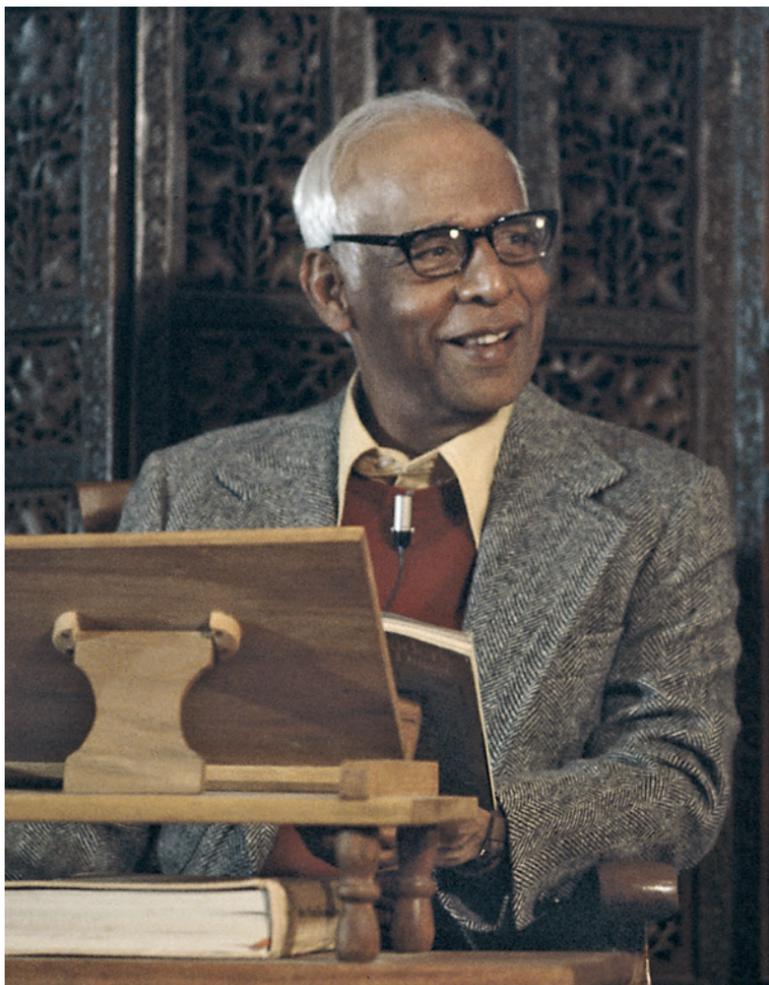
Ekhnath Easwaran, from a selection of his books

- 1.** On the list of priorities, first and foremost is meditation. It will clear your eyes and bring the detachment and discrimination we all need to make wise choices.
- 2.** Today, surrounded by a bewildering array of attitudes and lifestyles and models of behavior, most of which promise just the opposite of what they deliver, we need the capacity to make wise choices every moment just to keep from being swept away.
- 3.** When the mind is agitated, judgment is likely to be clouded; therefore the Gita says we should never undertake any action when angry or afraid.
- 4.** If you slow down enough to think clearly and act wisely, you have no need to worry because you know you are doing your best.
- 5.** We do not suddenly wake up one morning free from the lurid dream of separateness; unitary consciousness is the result of long years of trying to act, speak, and think for the welfare of all.
- 6.** You don't train the senses just for the sake of training the senses. The point is to get at the will, which is difficult to reach in any other way.



Ramagiri Ashram

7. No matter how massive our arsenals, how extensive the pollution of our environment, how violent our relationships, or how irreversible our direction may seem, we can change all these things by the choices we make from now on.
8. Once we enter the human context, the Buddha says, everything is in our hands. No fate compels us; no outside power can take from us the responsibility for wise choices which is our human heritage.



Easwaran, 1970s

Seeing from the Perspective of the Self

Eknath Easwaran, from *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*.
Easwaran is commenting on this verse:

Still your mind in me, still yourself in me,
and without doubt you will be united with me,
Lord of Love, dwelling in your heart.

(Bhagavad Gita, 12:8)

“Still yourself in me.” The word used here is *buddhi*: the intellect, discrimination. Not only the mind, but the intellect too has to rest completely in the Lord. Otherwise there is still the possibility of turmoil. This doesn’t mean that the intellect should be put to sleep forever. But to function well, it needs to rest securely under the direction of the Self. Its job is to make discriminating judgments: “What are the implications of this particular action? What will follow if I do this or do not do that?” To do this, it needs an overriding goal against which to compare and evaluate. Without a goal, on its own, it is liable to stay in its own little closet splitting hairs while the mind makes all the decisions, mostly on the basis of “I like this” and “I don’t like that.” So “still your intellect in me” means to look at life not from the narrow perspective of the ego, but from the perspective of the Atman. In practical terms, don’t judge things only by your own interests; look at the needs of the whole.

Look at the needs of the whole

People sometimes ask me, “How can we know what the perspective of the Atman is? Let alone identify with it, we don’t even know where to look.” It’s a fair question: after all, most of us seldom look at life from any perspective other than our own. Here there are a number of questions you can ask. For one, whenever you are about to do something – or are already in the middle of doing something – that you like very much or that is getting your mind all excited, ask yourself, “Whom will this really benefit?” You may get some rather partial testimony from the ego: it’s all for the other person’s benefit in the long run, simply a coincidence that it’s what you really want too, and so on. But that is the purpose of the intellect, to be a good judge – listen very carefully, ask penetrating and embarrassing questions, and finally render a sternly worded judgment: “This doesn’t benefit anybody, not even yourself.”

This isn’t to say that you shouldn’t care about your own personal benefit. But don’t go exclusively after your personal benefit. Keep the needs of the whole in view; then your own needs are included automatically. When you can do this always, continuously, you won’t even have to think about personal needs; they are taken for granted in the overall picture.

Take a long view

Second, take a long view of everything. The ego is short-sighted. It can’t see past the end of its nose, because it is all caught up in what it can get for itself right now. But the Atman is detached, which means that it can look far down the chain of cause and

effect to see the long-term result of every action – not only the result on the doer, but on others too.

Once we get past our early twenties, for example, I think most of us will have burned our fingers enough to draw the conclusion that if we see a flame, we can be reasonably certain that it will burn. Especially where pleasure is concerned, it can be very helpful to ask simply: “What does this promise and what has it actually delivered, to the best of my knowledge?” You can make a ledger and draw your own balance: “One German chocolate cake. Promise: gourmet ecstasy. Delivered: fifteen minutes of sweetness, stomachache, surrealistic dreams, and two pounds of extra weight.” It can help, even with a powerful desire like sex. But it’s not enough simply to analyze on the surface. You have to look deep within yourself and take a long view to see the total picture: what it promised and what it actually gave, not simply the next day but two years, ten years later.

Don't allow yourself to be caught in anything

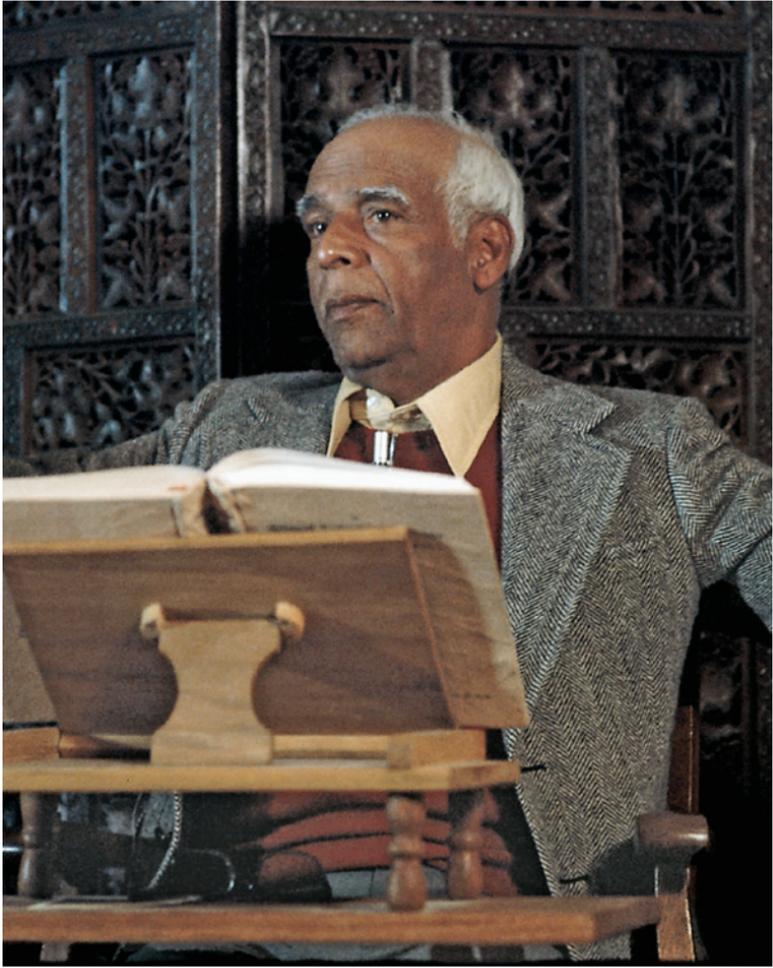
Third, remember the injunction of the previous verse: *Matparah*, “Make me your only goal.” Everything can be referred to that. “Will this deepen my meditation, improve my concentration, make my mind more even, make me less self-centered?” If it will, I will do it; if it won’t, I will not. “Will this divide my attention, isolate me from others, make me more speeded up, activate an old memory or desire?” If it will, I won’t do it, no matter how pleasant or how innocent it may seem. Keep the words of the Katha Upanishad always in mind:

“What is pleasant is one thing; what is wise is another. The first leads to sorrow, though pleasant at the time. The latter, though at first unpleasant, leads to lasting joy.”

Then, more subtly, don't allow yourself to be caught in anything. The moment you get caught in a particular activity, detachment goes. Worse, you are that much more cut off from the whole. One small part of life becomes blown up out of proportion, and all the rest shrinks into the background without your even realizing it. It is not possible to see this clearly without an overriding goal, but when you have such a goal, you can measure all your priorities against it.

Look, for example, at the question of physical fitness. Currently everyone seems to be running – not just jogging, but running for several miles every day. Not long ago there was a cross-city competition announced in San Francisco, a distance of some seven and a half miles, and almost fourteen thousand people showed up to take part. Now, I am all for physical fitness; who isn't? It is important for everyone, and it is especially important for those who are meditating seriously. But after all is said and done, running can be only a part of the spiritual life. If this is forgotten, there is the danger of filling your life with running – at the expense of meditation.

Let me make myself clear: I am all for running. But I would apply the same criterion to it as to every other human endeavor: “How much does this help me to realize the goal of life?” That is the measure of its value and the index of its priority.



Easwaran, 1970s

No attention left over for worrying

“Still yourself in me.” Next to the entrance to a bridge in San Francisco there used to be a sign with a short message from an Indian mystic of this century, Meher Baba: “Do your best. Don’t worry. Be happy.” I suppose many of the businessmen crossing that bridge at rush hour thought Meher Baba was playing Pollyanna. He was not; he was being supremely practical. Worry is usually no more than self-will in one of its more subtle disguises: everything is either “Am I up to this?” or “Is so-and-so going to manage to do this the way I want?” When you really are doing your best – in your meditation, in the other spiritual disciplines, at work, at home – there is no attention left over for worrying. Then you are beginning to rest yourself in the Lord, the Atman, at the very core of your being.

All this can be effectively practiced in personal relationships, which is the central theme of this chapter. Wherever there is agitation in a relationship – vacillation, estrangement, doubt, reservation – the capacity to love is divided; love is not yet complete. “How much did you do for me today? How much did you put into the emotional till? Six cents? I’m going to count. If it is six cents, I’ll give you six cents back. But if it’s five, I’m not going to give you more than five.” This is what we are accustomed to call love, even in some of the great romantic affairs of literature and history. But the mystics say, “That’s not love; that’s a commercial contract.” It divides two people, and it divides consciousness. If you want to love, all these reservations have to go.

A well of love

When your mind is still always – twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, not only in waking life, but even in your dreams – then, says Sri Krishna, “You will live in me continuously, absorbed in me, beyond any shadow of a doubt.” It is a state that is almost impossible to describe in words, but there are certain signs. For one, your awareness of the Lord will be unbroken. In a sense you will be meditating wherever you go, even if you are at your office or caught in the downtown shopping. Brother Lawrence’s words are perfect:

The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament.

To put it another way, the well of your love will be always full and always flowing. It will be natural for you to love; it will be impossible for you not to love. You won’t have to stop to think about how to respond to others. You will respond naturally, spontaneously, however is most appropriate for that person’s long-term welfare. And in your personal relationships there will be no conflict, no doubts, no reservations, no irritation. You will not need to prompt or force your love, and you will need no reason for loving or trusting or forgiving. As St. Bernard says, love is its own reason: “Love seeks no cause beyond itself and no fruit; it is its own fruit, its own enjoyment. I love because I love; I love in order that I may love.” 🌸

COMMUNITY STORY

Small Decisions, Big Decisions

Easwaran offers clues as to how we can gain a quieter mind and access the higher wisdom of the Self. One is “Take the long view.” To me, Easwaran is speaking of the daily, regular practice of meditation. Many years ago, at my first retreat, I committed to daily meditation, no matter what. Even if stillness is only fleeting during meditation, every small decision during the day is touched by that stillness.

Bigger decisions have their root in these small everyday decisions. For example, Easwaran writes, “Don’t allow yourself to be caught in anything.” Whenever I feel “entangled” – strongly compelled to act, speak, or get my way – I see this as a clue to stop; to wait until the feelings subside. This reminded me of “Training the Senses,” one of Easwaran’s eight points. When I defy a strong urge to speak, this is like defying an urge to have a cupcake. The cupcake urge is hard enough. But stopping myself from saying something, or waiting to speak, used to bring such agitation. I would feel that what I had to say was very important, or that I would forget the comment if I held onto it. Because I came from a family that always held lively conversations, it seemed natural for me to speak rather than pause.

I was attracted early to careers where this same strong urge to speak would continue. These environments seemed

to value speaking over listening, and the correctness of my narrative over yours. At a retreat, I learned that these tendencies to believe your point of view was correct, that you had to influence someone else, or that you had to inform someone of a vital fact, meant that you were entangled. Once I had this “Ah ha!” moment, it was easier for me to pause right at the nanosecond before I became agitated and felt the urge to speak. This helped me in little moments of the day to see there was another way to engage with others that felt more peaceful and secure.

After a while, I realized that my job was going against the principles I was meditating upon. The career change did not happen when I wanted it to, however, so I had to hang in there by focusing on my practice to be as peaceful a force as I could be in my current work life.

Then the pandemic hit. I just kept meditating and practicing the eight points as best I could. It no longer felt counter-intuitive. I had seen how being calmer and more peaceful and having a spiritual goal to direct my actions was helping everyone, including me. When I had a problem, I didn't get agitated. I would write it down, then repeat my mantram and give myself time to think.

Then out of the blue, a public service employer contacted me for an interview. I told them I wanted to work where people were giving their time selflessly. And that's now where I work.

— Elissa, California



Easwaran, 1990s

Nourish the Mind

Eknath Easwaran, from *Strength in the Storm*

Christine and I are fond of old movies, so I once took her to a real classic: *The Garden of Allah*, produced by David O. Selznick just three years before he made movie history with *Gone with the Wind*. It was pure Hollywood, overflowing with talent and flush with Technicolor.

In the story, Marlene Dietrich plays a beautiful woman traveling in the Sahara who meets and falls in love with a man who calls himself “Boris,” played by Charles Boyer. But Boris hides a secret: he is really Brother Antonio, who has fled his monastery to seek the pleasures he fancies he lost by seeking God.

As we watch the couple strolling in evening clothes across alluring sands, dining with cut glass and candlelight in luxuriant Bedouin tents, we can’t help feeling that Boris has found what he wants. Yet the more he struggles to find happiness outside himself, the more he is torn by what he left behind. Finally, after much soul-searching, he goes back to his monastery. For him, at least, not even Marlene Dietrich can compete with the promise of the interior life.

Even the scriptwriter didn’t seem to find this convincing. But I thought it made a good metaphor. Movies themselves are rather like a desert escape. For a couple of hours we can forget ourselves in someone else’s fantasy, as untouched by reality as Marlene Dietrich’s hair in the desert wind. And, like Boris, we are looking outside for something we can only find within.

Junk food for the mind

I call this the “media mirage,” for the entertainment industries have engulfed us in a dream-within-a-dream world that promises to entertain and distract us every hour of the waking day. We have so much to choose from, but very little that is nourishing – and some that is directly harmful. In this sense, experience can be very much like junk food for the mind.

Most of us take nutrition for granted. We forget that just three or four generations ago, it was preposterous to think that disease could arise from the *lack* of something. But today, thanks more to advertisers than to public health efforts, everyone knows that the human body cannot grow strong without specific nutrients. We may not know exactly what folic acid is or why we need metals like zinc and iron in our tissues, but we accept that substances like these are necessary for good health.

It is the same with the mind. Like the body, the mind too can get tense and sick. It too needs relaxation, needs to be stretched and exercised. But most important – and almost unknown today – it needs to be nourished. It has its own minimum daily requirements for health and strength, and it grows weak – even ill – if it is deprived of them for too long.

You are what you think

You know the slogan “You are what you eat.” I would say, “No, your body is what you eat. *You* are what you think.” Just as the body is made of food, the mind is made of thoughts: everything we think, feel, and take in through the five senses.

All of us want food that is nourishing. I don't think anyone really wants to live on products that weaken the body, even if they look attractive and have a shelf life of ten years. Similarly, the mind needs nourishing thoughts – tenderness, kindness, compassion, good will. It needs experiences that will make it stronger, finer, more flexible. Everything the mind takes in becomes part of character and consciousness, and the sum of all that is who we are.

Storehouse consciousness

Bones and muscles seem so solid; thoughts and perceptions appear to leave no more impression than writing on water. But the contents of consciousness – the accumulation of everything we have thought, felt, perceived, and experienced – is much more long-lasting than bodily tissues. Proteins and cells are constantly being replaced, but what goes into the mind settles into the unconscious and stays there.

A doughnut may not linger in the stomach, but what the body makes of it can stay with us far too long – usually in the wrong places. Similarly, though experiences are transient, what the mind makes of them becomes part of us for the rest of our lives.

Doughnuts, of course, like to settle about the hips. Sense impressions settle in what the Buddha calls “storehouse consciousness.” Just as a basement accumulates the stuff of a lifetime – forgotten photographs, discarded toys, brittle copies of *National Geographic* – the mind accumulates experiences in the basement of the unconscious.

Who we are

And this accumulation is who we are. That is why, though physical nutrition is important, nothing is more vital than what we feed the mind. After all, we consume food only part of the day. The mind eats all day long.

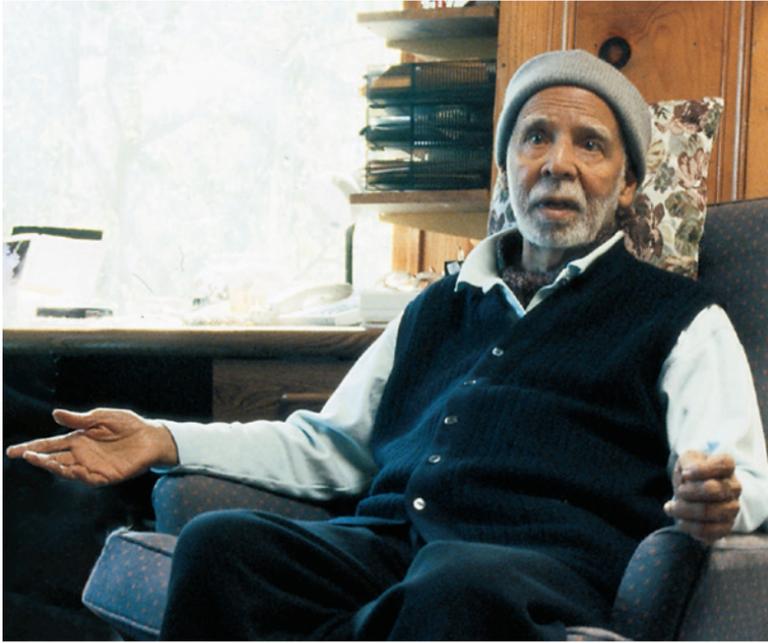
Once we grasp this, we see that every day is a binge. If we're not careful, the result is like what happens when we go on eating junk food. Imagine eating nothing but french fries. You would become a potato person: Ms. Deepfry, Mr. Chips. You would look and feel terrible. It is the same with the mind. Stuffing ourselves through the senses bloats the personality, filling it with images and "sound bites."

What the mind gets to eat

It is absolutely crucial, therefore, to have some choice in what goes into our consciousness. Just as there is junk food for the body, there is junk food for the mind. And that brings us to the mass media, for today most of what the mind gets to eat is prepared and served by the entertainment industry.

I once went with a friend to see what we thought was a harmless comedy. It turned out to be savage and violent, with attempts at humor that I found degrading. When we leave the theater after an experience like this, I think most of us feel a little worse inside. Shows like this are at the expense of the mind, certainly not for its benefit.

Besides violence, of course, the other staple of the media is sex. In the movies, whenever the plot begins to wear thin, people start taking off their clothes.



Easwaran, 1990s

At such times it is a study to watch the audience. Everybody – old, young, male, female – immediately gets absorbed. Even the popcorn is forgotten. That is not free concentration. It is compulsive, which is just as oppressive as compulsive eating.

A gradual shift in character

Sooner or later, one way or another, what we assimilate this way begins to show in our behavior. I don't mean that we literally go out and imitate what we see on the screen, the way children often do. The real effects go deeper: we become more and more like the examples we choose to see.

In most of us, for example, incessant exposure to violence in the media doesn't build up until we erupt in mayhem. Instead, there is a gradual shift in character. Over time, we find we have developed a more belligerent attitude, aggressive language, abusive behavior, increasingly frequent urges to strike back at someone who cuts in front of us on the road. Even if we do not want to behave this way, it seems to surge up from deep within, unbidden. It is not so much specific actions we absorb as attitudes, language, and primal drives like anger, greed, and fear.

No distinction between "real" and "unreal"

I can assure you that knowing the difference between film and reality does not make us immune to media experience. The unconscious draws no distinction between "real" and "unreal." Everything we take in through the senses is experience. Watching a thousand scenes of violence on the screen has much the same effect as in real life: it deadens sensitivity.

This is what the mass media can gradually do to us, and not only at viewing times. Our very instrument of enjoyment – the mind – is being dulled by degrees, and we take that lack of sensitivity into everything we do.

In such a state, what is it that we are absorbing? What image of ourselves is offered by the mass media, and how much of it do we want to assimilate?

Will I be the better for this?

Modern civilization tells us constantly that the human being is no more than the physical body. And of course that means

that other people are physical objects too. This is perhaps the greatest superstition of our times. Everywhere I go I remind people, “You are not a biochemical product. You are a human being.” I take very good care of my physical health, but my body is not me. It is the house in which I live. I am the resident; “Eknath Easwaran” is my address. Beneath all the shadow play of impurity and imperfection, aggression and hostility that we see around us, our real core is spirit: loving, forgiving, forbearing, tender, wise. This “original goodness” is what defines a human being.

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

Integration of character, conduct, and consciousness

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

When we start looking at everything like this, monotony goes out of life. Making these choices wisely throughout the day brings a deep integration of character, conduct, and consciousness. 🌸

COMMUNITY STORY

The Garden of My Mind

Many years ago, when I began to settle into the routine of meditation and absorbing the teachings of Easwaran, I started to change the way I looked at what my mind consumed. As a psychology student, I loved the analogy of the mind being like a garden – what you tended, flourished. I started looking at the friends I spent time with, the programs I watched, the books I read. With this change in perspective, changes, small at first, began to take place.

The first change concerned my friends with whom I had spent many evenings discussing relationships, work, and other current challenges. These conversations often included feelings of anger, insecurity, or a recent injustice, and left me feeling exhausted, not revived. I felt like these relationships were invasive plants in my garden that needed to be managed. Slowly, these conversations began to lose their charm.

I would rather talk about the challenges of changing habits, of going deeper in my meditation, or at least focus on the positive. Over time I began to reduce the time spent with people who were on a different path to me, and to select those who would contribute to similar conversations of interest.

Then there was the daily news, filled with a constant barrage of negativity, and our favourite family TV series with all the engaging stories of affairs, violence, deception, mystery, and other things which I could now perceive as negative contributors to my mind's garden. I began to change

the channel purposefully, or if others in the family wanted to watch these programs I'd move myself to the dining table to do some other task.

Ten years on, the pull of modern life still challenges me, especially when living alone. Surfing the net, watching social media or a TV series where the next episode starts automatically are all so tempting.

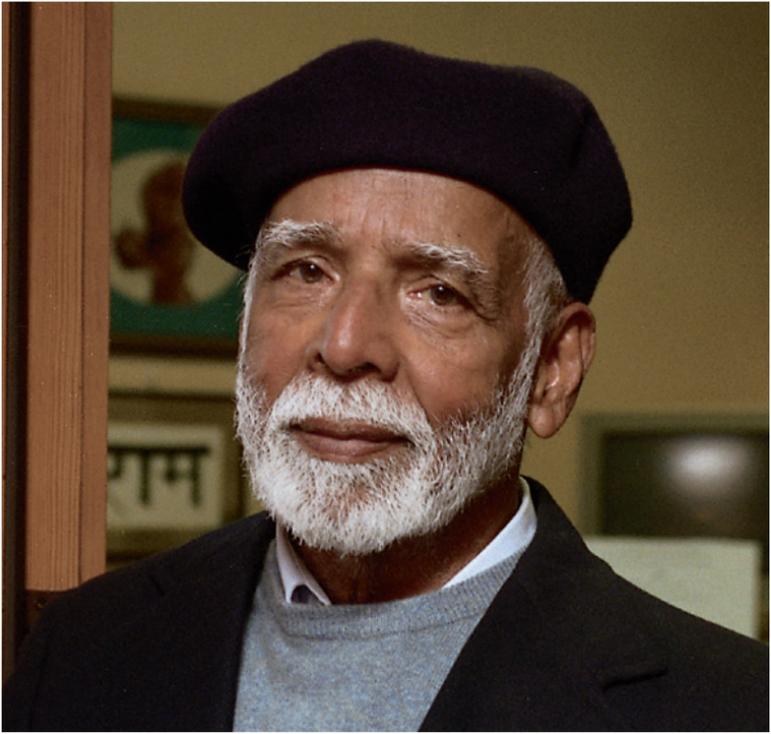
After spending most of my workday on the computer, I now aim to reduce my screen time and to harness the power of technology by setting up limits on my phone and apps. I believe moderation is better than abstinence in our technology-driven modern lifestyles. This also allows me to continually grow my determination and will power.

Remembering to be kind and compassionate towards myself has helped me build these behaviours over years to become a part of me rather than making myself feel guilty.

If I'm feeling lazy or sluggish, then movement is required, and a few chores can change my mood. Once I finally settle down to read for 30 minutes my mind may still start wandering, but my will is determined, so I have found listening to an audio book and following along in the paper copy for enhanced concentration really helpful.

By actively taking responsibility for my choices and decisions on how I spend my time, I am constantly tending to the garden of my mind, encouraging it to bloom and blossom in the ways that make me feel like I am becoming the best version of myself.

— Amita, UK



Easwaran, 1990s

A Truly Selfless Life

Eknath Easwaran, from *Conquest of Mind*

Do you remember Charles Dickens's *Christmas Carol*? In an eerie scene, which I still recall vividly from the movie, the ghost of Scrooge's old partner Marley comes into Scrooge's bedroom rattling his chains. Scrooge looks up and exclaims in fright, "Marley! What happened to you? How did you come by all those chains?" And Alec Guinness, with that sardonic grin of his, replies grimly, "I made them all myself. Link by link. Every one of them."

That is what selfish pursuits become in the long run: chains. Though we never intended it, though we may have taken it up only as recreation, every selfish activity becomes a chain. At the outset we have no intention of disliking and avoiding and deprecating and manipulating. But in the end we find ourselves with very little choice. In matters of this magnitude, an ounce of discrimination is worth pounds and pounds of the effort it takes to cut off chains with a dainty jeweler's file, which is the kind of work that is required when selfish habits are allowed to grow rigid and strong.

"I found thee not, O Lord, without, because I erred in seeking thee without that wert within." Augustine speaks for us all. When we do not know that life's fulfillment lies within us, we cannot help reaching for what is outside. And the more these attempts fail to satisfy, the more insecure we become.

Something more

That is why so many spend their lives in some kind of hoarding: money, possessions, pleasures, memories, always trying to reassure themselves with something more. Advertisers cash in on this desire every day. Those copywriters on Madison Avenue really know what touches us. They must be sitting over their cups of espresso every morning and saying, “Just call those cigarettes ‘More.’ You don’t have to say more of what, just ‘More.’ Everybody will respond.”

Do you remember *Fiddler on the Roof*, when Tevye exclaims, “Lord, if money is a curse, strike me so hard that I may never recover from it!” This is probably a universal sentiment. It is the basis of the confusion in which civilization so often functions: make as much money as you can; it will make you happy, secure, loved, and respected.

Our real wealth

Of course, money has a place in life, even in the spiritual life. But to ascribe to money these impossible magic qualities, to make it the measure of things or the very goal of life, is to disinherit ourselves from the divine trust fund we all have stored up inside. Our real wealth is our inner resources, which are infinite because the core of our personality is divine. And the purpose of life is not to accumulate physical tokens of wealth but to mine these deeper resources for the good of all. That is the supreme goal of our existence and the only source of lasting value.

Meister Eckhart, one of the greatest mystics the world has produced, puts this in memorable words:

Nature's purpose is neither food, nor drink, nor clothing, nor comfort, nor anything else from which God is left out. Whether you like it or not, whether you know it or not, secretly nature seeks and hunts and tries to ferret out the track in which God may be found.

A different kind of GNP

Most of our daily activities, by contrast, are rooted in the religion of "more": more wealth, more possessions, more production, bigger cash flow. We even evaluate nations in these terms, as if national quantities of goods and wealth had anything to do with the quality of life for individual human beings.

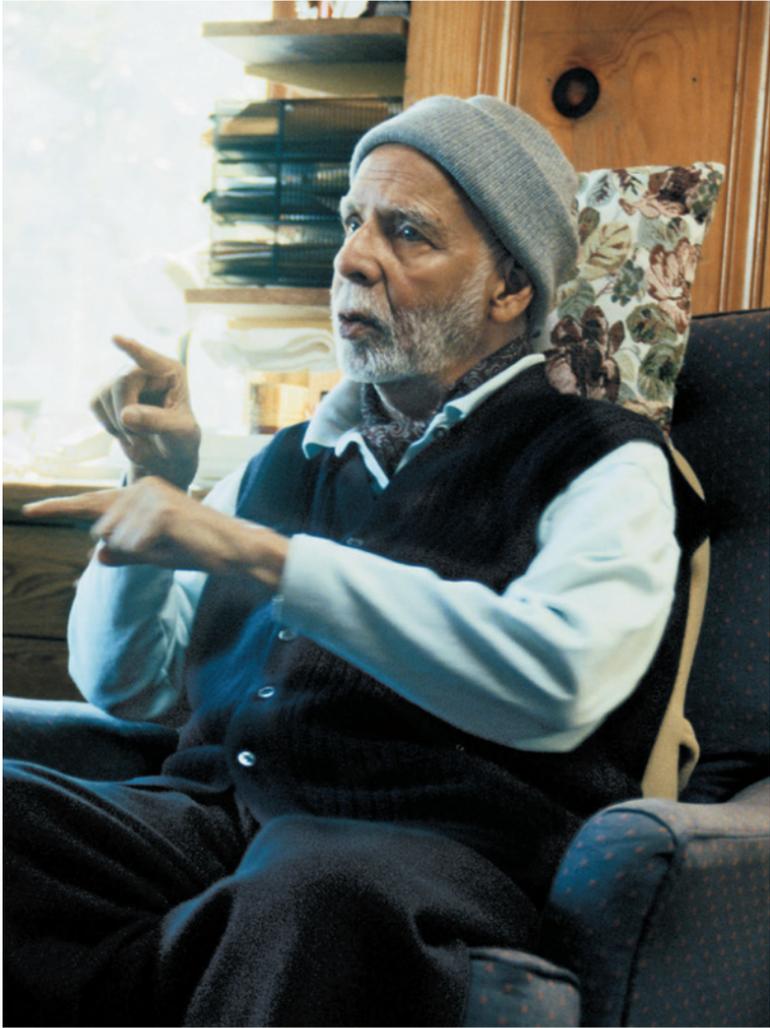
Developing countries, for example, are advised to do anything they can to increase their GNP, even though it may benefit no one in that country but a wealthy few. Borrowing Eckhart's phrase, I would advise any country to interpret "GNP" very differently: "Do everything you can to further Great Nature's Purpose." Translated into economic terms, this means not more corporate cash crops but, first, enough food for those who grow it. It means not more goods for export but productive work for people where they live. It means not more economic activity for the nation, but meaningful economic activity for that nation's people: work, goods, and services that actually improve the quality of life for individual men, women, and children. I like very much that statement "Food for people, not for profit." Everything should be for people; that is what the unity of life means in practice.

Nature itself is teaching us

How farsighted old Eckhart was, back in medieval Germany! In the end, Nature itself is teaching us the first lesson of discrimination: that “more” can only be sought within, and trying to satisfy infinite appetites in a finite world is not merely futile but disastrous. “More, more, more” simply cannot be had forever, not at any expense. Every material resource is limited; many today are in critically short supply. Clean air is scarce. Cities and states stage courtroom battles over water. Essential minerals, their natural availability further hampered by global politics, are being used up at a prodigious rate. Abruptly we are being forced to learn that everything is limited. Every resource has to be used wisely, thriftily, even if we do manage to slow our accelerating rate of consumption.

This is not simply a matter of economics. It is a clear sign that we need to look for a wiser religion than materialism. The idea of growth for growth’s sake, which has been the driving motive behind civilization for hundreds of years, can now be likened to what one writer calls a “creed of cancer.” We are pushing the natural physical limits of our environment to such an extent that we can safely go no further – if, indeed, we have not already gone too far. “Lack of discrimination is the source of the greatest danger”: we are at a precipice, and over the edge lies disaster.

Thoughtful observers all over the world today echo what twenty years ago almost no one believed: that discrimination lies in wanting less from the world outside us, and that great dangers can arise from wanting more and more. The whole



Easwaran, 1990s

world today is held to ransom by the stockpiles of the deadliest “growth industry” in history, the nuclear arms race. Yet we go on adding to our bank accounts, our collectibles, our “survival stores,” the lists of pleasures we have enjoyed, as if by keeping busy we can escape what common sense says should dictate the first priority of us all: the fact that in half an hour’s time, life as we know it can simply come to an end.

Lifeboat ethics

Some years ago, a distinguished biologist propounded a theory called “lifeboat ethics” in an attempt to enlighten ignorant altruists on the subject of world hunger. The idea is simple: the wealthier nations are in a lifeboat with limited supplies; the poor nations are floundering in the sea. “Obviously,” he points out, “not everybody can be saved.” If we try to put everyone in the boat, everybody will lose. Better – perhaps, he says, even more humane – to let die the millions who cannot save themselves and help the few nations who may be able to achieve self-sufficiency. We might begin, he adds candidly, with those whose survival is important to our own national self-interest.

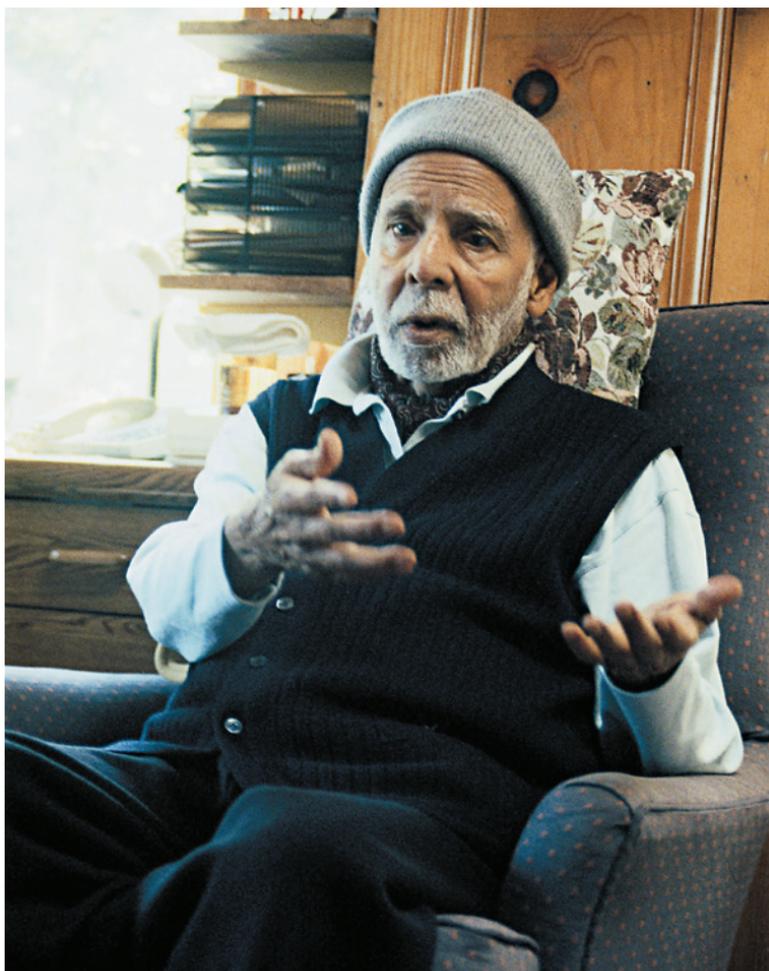
Many people, I am glad to say, immediately assailed this as not lifeboat ethics but gunboat ethics. Yet the principle behind it continues to influence national policy, simply because both focus on the fatal fallacy that one nation – or one race, or one individual – can achieve its welfare at another’s expense. This distinguished scientist, I would say, missed the point of his own metaphor. We are all in that lifeboat, “spaceship Earth,”

and the “deathboat ethics” he describes cannot help but lead to throwing others overboard, for the simple reason that it is based on saving not the lives of many but the lifestyle of a few. I mention this theory because the same kind of reasoning comes up also in discussions of nuclear war. The main reason we say such a war is unthinkable, Herman Kahn once said, is “because we are crazy.” To be sane, he said, we should acknowledge that of course it is thinkable and plan accordingly.

No one really has any idea what this would entail, but on the basis of Hiroshima and guesswork the experts estimate that perhaps twenty million people – not even soldiers on a battlefield, but ordinary citizens – would die immediately in even a limited nuclear exchange. Social and economic chaos would follow, and deaths in the hundreds of thousands would accumulate from aftereffects in the years to come. But simple arithmetic, Dr. Kahn pointed out, still leaves sixty to a hundred million people who might survive in one form or another. If we can save what we need to rebuild factories and pump up our GNP again – and, of course, rearm the nation – we could reasonably claim to have “won.”

Who is this “we”?

This, too, is a remarkably candid comment on values. Who is this “we”? First priority in the nuclear lifeboat, of course, goes to saving our federal and military leaders – although it is difficult to say whom they would lead, and whether they had done that good a job in the first place. Next comes protecting and rebuilding our capacity to turn out material goods, without



Easwaran, 1990s

which America would supposedly not be America. Least critical, apparently, are the nameless, expendable casualties: the men, women, and children who happen to live in or around Washington, Dallas, San Francisco, Seattle, Detroit, Chicago, Boston, New York, and dozens of other cities that are known to be targets in a nuclear war.

Positive, practical alternatives

You can see that when I say this is “deathboat ethics,” I am not trying to be clever. Sacrificing others is always the result when getting and holding are valued more than individual lives. Shreya, the long-term benefit of all, urges, “Life first. Everything should be for the sake of life.” Preya says, “Me first” – whether “me” is a person, a corporation, or someone’s exclusive idea of the national interest.

It is important to answer the proposals of deathboat ethics by presenting positive, practical alternatives. Discriminating between preya and shreya is always a good place to begin. What is in the real interests of the whole? A workable answer needs to include the interests of everyone involved. To shed this nuclear nightmare, we have to change the attitudes which lead to war, beginning with the assumption that we are all adversaries in life, fighting over a larger share of the pie. “There is enough on earth for everyone’s need,” Gandhi said, “but not enough for everyone’s greed.” Discrimination means understanding that the welfare of each of us is part of the welfare of us all.

*

What do you think future generations will have to say about our times? We have made tremendous advances: in medicine, in genetics, in space travel, in communications, in any number of important fields. But where essentials are concerned, I don't think our civilization has made much progress at all.

In this next stage of civilization, it is the mystics we need to point the way. Mystics are great pioneers. Just one man like Saint Francis or Mahatma Gandhi, one woman like Saint Teresa, is enough to show the rest of us the goal to aim for, shining dimly through the haze of personal pursuits. In every age, the Bhagavad Gita promises, the Infinite comes to life in a finite personality to remind us what life is for. But we needn't wait for someone to come and lead us. The spark of divinity hidden in your consciousness and mine can inspire any of us – ordinary people like you and me – to turn inward and learn to live as trustees for the rest of life. We need not wait for another Gandhi. A number of mini-mahatmas would be enough to turn our times around.

A frame of reference

Until we make this turning, however, our culture is drifting at sea. Only with a goal do momentary events become meaningful, for only then do we have a frame of reference into which events can fit. Our contemporary society does not believe in frames of reference; we have no real direction. Making money is not a goal, and accumulating possessions is little better. I doubt that there has been a time in history when wealth and possessions

were within reach of so many; and I doubt there has been a time when the human being has been more lonely, more frustrated, more unsure of the future, more angry or violent or afraid, not only in this country but all over the world.

The mystics' answer is direct and down to earth: "Learn to discriminate between what is permanent and what is passing. Choose every day to do things that improve your health, promote lasting security, and deepen relationships: things that in the long run contribute to the well-being of your society and of the world. In this lies your happiness, your salvation, your very future."

"Our whole business in life," Augustine exhorts us, "is to restore to health the eye of the heart whereby God may be seen." Every one of us has the responsibility of evolution in his or her own hands. The resources for spiritual evolution are within each of us; they are our very own.

Do our best to grow

To fail to live up to this challenge, my spiritual teacher used to say, is simply being irresponsible. This is not asking for perfection but merely expecting us to do our best to grow. If we do not do this much, we are depriving life of a contribution that only we can make. Spiritual living is responsible living. I am responsible not only for myself but for all of you, just as all of you are responsible for each other and for me.

This concern for the life and well-being of every creature, Saint Teresa says, is the beginning and end of the spiritual life:

The contemplative life expands into activities which spring from this root and produce lovely and fragrant flowers. They spring from this tree of the love of God alone, for him alone, without anything of self-interest; and the fragrance of these flowers spreads all around, for the good of many. . . .

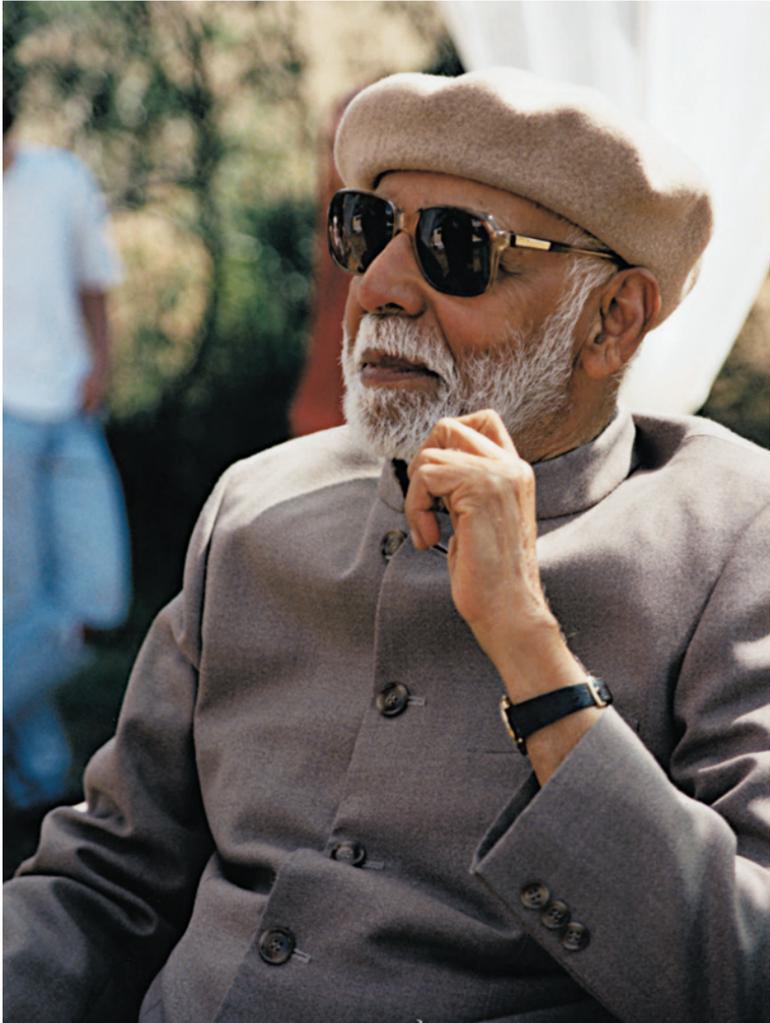
This is the ideal of discriminating action, which flows spontaneously from those who know the spiritual basis of life. It comes when we live in the highest state of awareness, when our lives become a benediction to every person and creature around us. We live then a truly selfless life, one in which we think never in terms of personal profit or pleasure but always in terms of global prosperity and world peace.

Selfless efforts of little people

For even these grand goals ultimately depend not on governments but on the selfless efforts of little people like you and me. In the long run, friendly persuasion is the only effective teacher. Human beings are educable; human beings can always grow. “If one man gains spiritually,” Gandhi said, “the whole world gains with him.”

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.

May that prayer guide each of us in our daily lives. 🌸



Easwaran, 1990s

The Blessing of a Well-Trained Mind

The Dhammapada

As an archer aims his arrow, the wise aim their restless thoughts, hard to aim, hard to restrain.

As a fish hooked and left on the sand thrashes about in agony, the mind being trained in meditation trembles all over, desperate to escape the hand of Mara the Tempter.

Hard it is to train the mind, which goes where it likes and does what it wants. But a trained mind brings health and happiness. The wise can direct their thoughts, subtle and elusive, wherever they choose: a trained mind brings health and happiness.

Those who can direct thoughts, which are unsubstantial and wander so aimlessly, are freed from the bonds of Mara.

They are not wise whose thoughts are not steady and minds not serene, who do not know dharma, the law of life. They are wise whose thoughts are steady and minds serene, unaffected by good and bad. They are awake and free from fear.

Remember, this body is like a fragile clay pot. Make your mind a fortress and conquer Mara with the weapon of wisdom. Guard your conquest always.

More than those who hate you, more than all your enemies, an untrained mind does greater harm.

More than your mother, more than your father, more than all your family, a well-trained mind does greater good.

O Infinite Being!

Swami Paramananda

O Infinite Being! O Supreme Lord!

Teach us how to pray and how to meditate.

Make our thoughts so one-pointed, deep and unwavering
that they may penetrate the inner depths of our being
and perceive Thee.

Lift our mind to that plane where there is no heaviness,
where there is no darkness, but only illumination and bliss.

Lead us from delusion to the Light of Wisdom.

Grant that we may feel Thy Divine Presence within us;
That our soul may awaken from the sense-slumber of unreality
and be ready to hear Thy call;
That our heart may be full of tolerance and compassion;
That peace and tranquility may pervade our whole being.

May Thy peace and blessing abide with us and protect us from
all unworthy thoughts and actions.

Peace! Peace! Peace be upon all living beings.



BMCM offices at Ramagiri Ashram



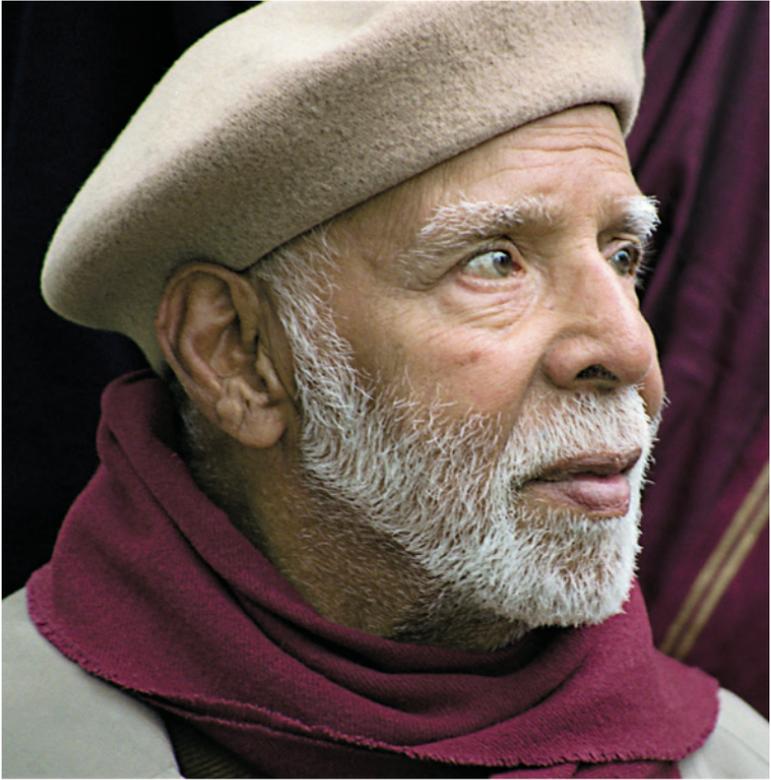
Ramagiri Ashram



Christine Easwaran, Spring 2020



Ramagiri Ashram



Easwaran, 1990s

A Sense of Urgency

Eknath Easwaran, from *Climbing the Blue Mountain*

I admire the daring of young people who master skills like surfing. They have to undergo very dedicated training, perhaps for several years – just as I have had to do in learning to master my life. The main difference is our priorities. For them surfing goes at the top of the list. For me nothing comes before learning how to live. After that, we can take on surfing or skiing or anything else we choose. But unless we know how to live, no matter what else we do know, life itself will slip through our fingers.

When I read about people, especially older people, following the surf to Hawaii or the snow to South America, I remember the haunting lines in the Bhagavad Gita where the Lord says, “I am come as time, the waster of the peoples, / Ready for that hour that ripens to their ruin.”

Young or old, there isn't much time allotted to us. We should remember this every day. When we see life's supreme goal clearly, we become acutely aware how urgent it is to learn to live. Then we stop saying to ourselves, “Oh, I can afford to wait. One more week, what does it matter? One more month – why not wait till the New Year?” We cannot afford to waste even a minute of our lives; for as Thoreau says, we cannot kill time without injuring eternity.

This sense of urgency itself is one of the greatest benefits of meditation, perhaps even greater than physical health or emotional security. It brings all our activities into focus. Every moment becomes precious, for every moment is an opportunity to move closer to the goal of life.

Further Resources for Learning to Meditate and Deepening Your Practice

From the BMCM Programs team

Introductory Webinars

A chance to try out passage meditation.

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

Introductory 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.



Attendees at an online retreat

BMCM Satsang Live

Our twice-weekly online satsang takes place on Tuesdays from 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Pacific Time and is repeated on Sundays from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Pacific Time.

Find more at www.bmcm.org/community/bmcm-satsang-live/.

Online Retreats, Webinars, & Workshops

Our 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.

Introductory Webinars:

May 13, August 5

Returnee Workshop:

June 3

Weeklong Retreat:

June 23–27

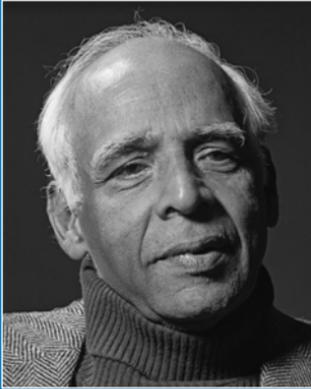
Introductory Weekend Retreat:

July 28–30

Returnee Weekend Retreat:

August 11–13

For more information about upcoming events, including fees and financial aid, visit our website at www.bmcm.org/programs. We'd love to have you join us!



In the ordinary choices
of every day we begin to
change the direction of
our lives.

— Eknath Easwaran,
Words to Live By

Eknath Easwaran (1910–1999) is the originator of passage meditation and the author of more than 30 books on spiritual living.

Easwaran was a professor of English literature at a leading Indian university when he came to the United States in 1959 on the Fulbright exchange program. A gifted teacher, he moved from education for degrees to education for living, and gave talks on meditation and spiritual living for 40 years.

In 1961 he founded the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, a nonprofit organization that publishes his books, videos, and audio talks, and offers online retreats and programs.

Easwaran lived what he taught, giving him lasting appeal as a spiritual teacher and author of deep insight and warmth.