



EKNATH
EASWARAN

has been called one of the foremost teachers of meditation in our times. From his arrival in the United States in 1959 on the Fulbright exchange program until his passing in the fall of 1999, he taught to modern men and women his Eight Point Program, based on his unique method of meditation on memorized inspirational passages from the world's great religions. Many thousands of people representing the full range of cultural and religious backgrounds attest to the benefits of his teaching. He continues to teach through his twenty-seven books on spiritual living — over a million copies in print in twenty-six languages — and through the ongoing programs and publications of the organization he founded in 1961 to carry on his work: the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation and its publishing arm, Nilgiri Press.

Taking the Plunge

By Eknath Easwaran

A FEW YEARS AGO I saw a documentary about penguins that depicted the lives of these droll creatures almost from the first moment. They looked so human that I found it easy to identify with them as they grew into adults, impeccably attired in evening coats and tails, and set about learning to live in the world around them.

To me it seemed a most inhospitable environment. Penguins hatch in craggy Antarctic rookeries high above frigid waters, which are probably covered with ice for half the year. But the little ones evidently felt quite cozy in those precarious nests. For some time, while they are protected by their parents, they eat, sleep, and do precious little else.

But once the young birds begin to molt, their parents make a drastic move. Up to this time they have been loyal and attentive, inspiring examples for the rest of the avian world. But when it comes time for the children to grow up, the parents simply walk out. There is a great parade of them away from the rookery, and the scene they leave behind is sorrowful indeed. The fledglings I saw looked so dazed that I had to keep reminding myself it was all part of a larger picture.

An earlier version of this article appears in Eknath Easwaran's book *Climbing the Blue Mountain*, a collection of short pieces that includes his instructions in meditation. Some new material has been added from our archive of Easwaran's talks.

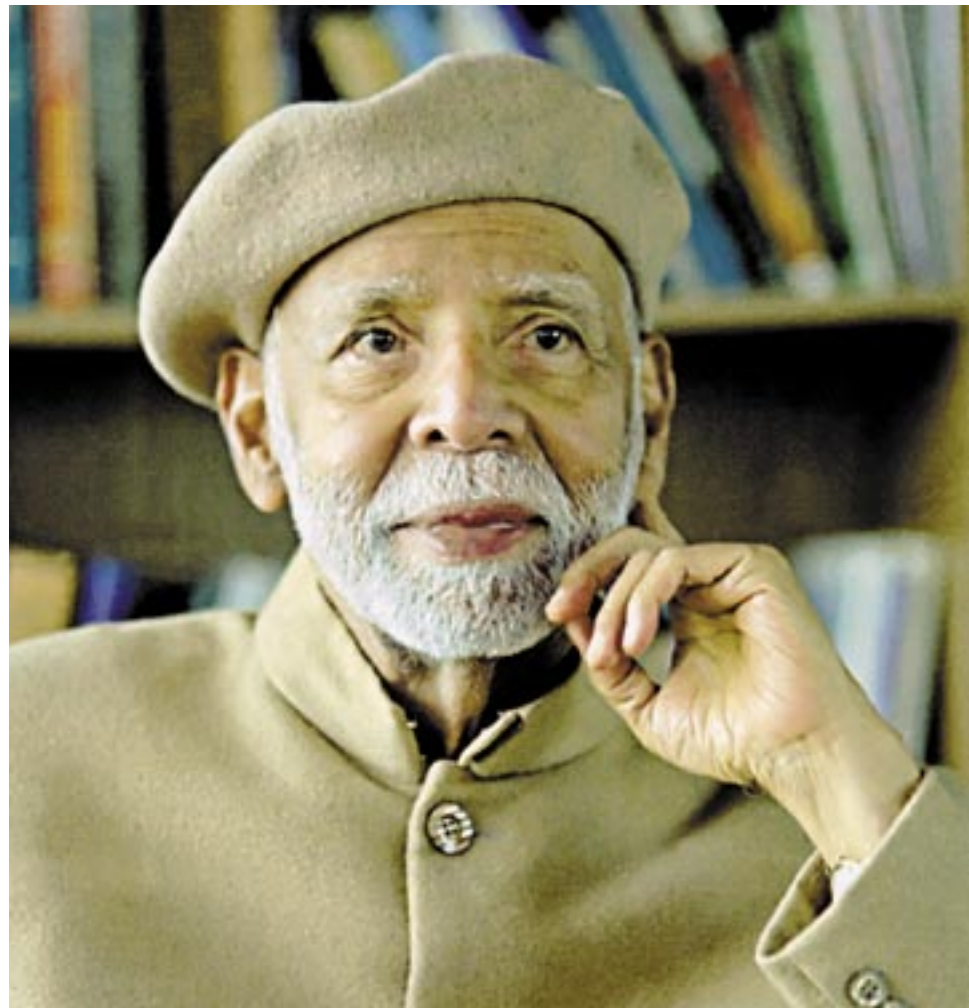
Unless the parents leave them, the children will sit in the nest and never grow up, having their five meals a day, quarreling over who gets what, and never learning to fend for themselves.

With their parents gone, the children naturally began to feel hungry. One day passed; they suppressed their hunger. Two days passed, and their stomachs grew insistent. Finally, after three days or so, they could stand it no longer. Some of them ventured out of their nests.

Penguins are inquisitive by nature, and one of the fledglings in this film was more inquisitive and daring than any of the others. I called him Peter, and he really captured my imagination. I could almost see what was going on behind those

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Below, from our archives: Eknath Easwaran, 1996



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I Taking the Plunge



Each of us faces the opportunity to take our evolution into our own hands through the practice of meditation, writes Sri Easwaran. Here he comments on three benefits of diving into the spiritual life.

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Reconnecting with her practice of the Eight Points after several decades, Linda Patterson discovers anew the promise and practicality of this spiritual program.

9 A Vital Connection



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11 Overcoming Fear



A self-professed worrier, F.J. Lucchino draws on his meditation practice to clear a series of internal and external hurdles.

Blue Mountain Center of Meditation

The Center offers instruction and guidance in meditation and allied living skills, following the Eight Point Program developed by Sri Eknath Easwaran. The approach is nondenominational, nonsectarian, and free from dogma and ritual. It can be used within each person's own cultural and religious background to relieve stress, heal relationships, release deeper resources, and realize one's highest potential.

The Eight Point Program

1. **MEDITATION** Silent repetition in the mind of memorized inspirational passages from the world's great religions. Practiced for one-half hour each morning.
2. **THE MANTRAM** Silent repetition in the mind of a Holy Name or a hallowed phrase from one of the world's great religions. Practiced whenever possible throughout the day or night.
3. **SLOWING DOWN** Setting priorities and reducing the stress and friction caused by hurry.
4. **ONE-POINTED ATTENTION** Giving full concentration to the matter at hand.
5. **TRAINING THE SENSES** Overcoming conditioned habits and learning to enjoy what is beneficial.
6. **PUTTING OTHERS FIRST** Gaining freedom from selfishness and separateness; finding joy in helping others.
7. **SPIRITUAL COMPANIONSHIP** Spending time regularly with others following the Eight Point Program for mutual inspiration and support.
8. **READING THE MYSTICS** Drawing inspiration from writings by and about the world's great spiritual figures and from the scriptures of all religions.

Sri Eknath Easwaran

Schooled in both Eastern and Western traditions, Eknath Easwaran took to the spiritual life amidst a successful career in India as a professor of English literature, a writer, and a lecturer. He came to the University of California, Berkeley, in 1960 on the Fulbright exchange program and established the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation in Northern California in 1961. His 1968 Berkeley class is believed to be the first accredited course in meditation at any Western university. His deep personal experience and his love for his students have made the ancient art of meditation accessible to those who hold jobs and live active lives among friends and family.

A note about Sri Easwaran's name: *Sri* is a traditional Indian honorific, *Eknath* is his family name, and *Easwaran* is the name given to him by his spiritual teacher, his mother's mother.

Words to Open Doors



Christine Easwaran

WORDS WIELD power. They can penetrate into deeper consciousness, influencing thoughts and behavior. For that reason, words are chosen with great care in many professions, ranging from politics to poetry.

Easwaran, too, chose his words carefully. In fact, they were his vocation when he was a young man making a name as a writer and public speaker and later as a professor of English literature.

His appreciation for the power of words started early. Growing up in an orthodox Hindu family in South India, Easwaran was taught at an early age to memorize prayers and Vedic verses in Sanskrit – the ancient language that he studied in school, as well as under the temple priest. In high school he studied English, which was not spoken in his village, and fell in love with English literature, memorizing great amounts of poetry from Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of Songs & Lyrics*. Even in his eighties he delighted in quoting these poems to illustrate his spiritual talks.

It was Easwaran's deep affinity for words that prepared the way for his great spiritual discovery. Significantly, the first book he bought when he went to college was a second-hand copy of the Bhagavad Gita, a small volume in Sanskrit which we are

happy to have in our archives. Sacred verses from this popular scripture came to his rescue years later when he turned to it for solace and understanding. Complete concentration on the holy words of the Gita opened doors into his inner consciousness, revealing their deep meaning and changing his life forever.

This was the beginning of the method of meditation associated with his name. Sometimes called "passage meditation," his method involves going slowly, in the mind, through the words of a passage from the scriptures or mystics that embodies one's highest ideals and appeals deeply to the heart. "The principle is simple," he explained. "We become what we meditate on. Slow, sustained concentration on these words drives them deep into consciousness. There they take root and begin to create wonderful changes in our lives."

When recommending passages for meditation, Easwaran chose with precision and care. "A meditation passage is more than great poetry," he told us. "It is an instrument. It is going to transform your character, conduct, and consciousness, so it should be chosen with the same care as a sculptor chooses a chisel. It should be positive, practical, inspiring, and universal" – qualities he explains in the box on page 6. "And it should be inspired. The words of a meditation passage draw their power from the depth of experience behind them. When Teresa of Avila tells us, 'Let nothing disturb you,' it comes from the depths of her soul, where all of

us are one. Those words are like arrows shot straight into our hearts from hers."

Searching for the perfect meditation passage for a Western audience, Easwaran settled on the Prayer of St. Francis: "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace." Soon, his passion to share and his gift for poetry led him to make English translations of the passages that had meant the most to him, beginning with the Bhagavad Gita. Those translations are doubly charged. Added to the power of their source is the passion and wisdom of this gifted teacher who, in seeking meaning for his own life, discovered this simple method that anyone can use to attain life's goal without any change of religion or belief. Most of these translations and many other beautiful passages from the world's spiritual traditions can be found in his anthology *God Makes the Rivers to Flow*.

Christine Easwaran

For the Board of Trustees



In Central India in the years between college and graduate school, Eknath Easwaran was a popular speaker at clubs and public functions.

Continued from page 1 curious, beady eyes as he waddled to the edge of the cliff and peered down at the cold, gray waves crashing against the rocks below. He must have known instinctively that the sea meant fulfillment. If he could only get into the water, he would not die on the rocks but live as a penguin should. But his senses were telling him just the opposite. He hurried back and told the others, "This is death! Better to stay here and go hungry than to face such a terrible fate."

The rest of the rookery were all too willing to agree. "This may not be much of a life," their faces said, "but it's better than violent death. Who knows? Mom and Pop may still come back."

But Mom and Pop did not come back, and finally the hunger grew so fierce that the young ones could not live with it any longer. One morning Peter made his way slowly back to the edge of the cliff. He was still afraid, but anything must have seemed better to him than starvation. He closed his eyes and, with one brave leap, he hurled himself out into the air. The expression on his face said clearly, "My number is up!" We heard a great splash; I could almost feel the shock of the icy waters. Peter disappeared beneath the waves.

There was an agonizing pause. Then, to my great relief, up bobbed a bright-eyed, slightly sheepish little face. Peter churned his wings and wagged his tail vigorously. Within minutes he was swimming gracefully through the waves, at home at last. "Hey," he squawked up to his friends. "Come on down! This is what we were born for."

Some of the other penguins waddled to the ledge and poked their heads over to see. But even after seeing Peter's exuberance, only two or three were willing to take the plunge. Most of them decided to approach their destiny by stages – that is, they hunted for ledges they could climb

down. They took a lot of time about it too, looking for just the right ledge and then descending with excruciating care. Only after they were perched about six feet above the water would they cautiously fall in. But once they were in, they too began to crow. "Hey, Pete, wait up! You were right; this is really living."

Still some were not prepared to take this last little six-foot plunge. They just

To make wise choices in life, even in simple matters, we have to have a goal to which we can refer every day.

sat there on the lowest ledge, and no amount of frolicking on the part of their friends could induce them to dive in. But even for them, all was not lost. Gradually the tide rose, and one by one the waves washed every penguin into the sea.

I found this a very heartening ending. The whole of life, the mystics of all religions tell us, is moving inexorably toward the sea of joy and fulfillment that we call God. Some – great saints like Teresa of Avila or Mahatma Gandhi – plunge into this sea boldly. Many of the rest of us, busy with other pursuits, wait for the tide to rise. But none of us is lost. Life has a goal, and in the Hindu and Buddhist perspective, even if it takes hundreds of lifetimes, evolution itself will carry us to the fulfillment of life's purpose, which is Self-realization.

On the other hand, even though we cannot be lost, we can surely dally. Here we have a uniquely human choice: shall we wait for millions of years, knocked about in the painful process of evolution, until we finally enter this sea of joy; or shall we try to enter now, in this very lifetime, by taking our personal evolution into our own hands? Whatever our past, whatever our condition, this is something

that every one of us can do, through the practice of meditation.

When I first began to present this theme in talks around the San Francisco Bay Area, meditation was often looked upon with suspicion. One hard-headed businessman from the Kaiser corporation gave me his perspective with executive clarity. "Don't talk to me about joy," he said. "Don't tell me about saints or scriptures. If I take the plunge and start practicing this 'meditation,' I want you to tell me just what benefits it will bring me: one, two, three."

That struck me as a practical request, so I began to tick them off for him systematically, just as he had asked: one, two, three.

A goal worth striving for

First and foremost, meditation gives us a lofty goal – nothing less than the fulfillment of our full human potential – and the means by which that goal can be achieved. No matter how far technology advances, it is not possible to live well without an overriding goal in life, just as it is not possible to get where you want to go without a destination. With a goal, even if you wander, you always know how to regain your course. Without a goal, you never even know where you are.

I had a friend in India who once got so restless that he went down to Madras Central, laid his money on the counter, and said, "Give me a ticket."

The clerk, who was used to all kinds of people, asked politely, "Where to, sir?"

My friend shrugged. "Just give me a ticket – any ticket. I don't care where I go."

This seems to be our condition today, and as a result we find ourselves with an increasing number of problems. To make wise choices in life, even in simple matters, we have to have a goal to which we can refer every day. Otherwise events are irrelevant; they do not hang together in any meaningful pattern.

I came across a good illustration of

this once when I went into the living room and found that a young friend had spread the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle all over the floor. "It's an elephant," he announced. "But I can't even find a tusk."

I grew up with elephants, so I would have sworn that I could recognize one from every imaginable angle. But nothing on the floor looked like any part of an elephant I had seen.

Then I saw the picture on the box. "Oh!" I said. "Now I know what I am supposed to be looking for. This looks like part of the trunk; that must be the tip of an ear." After that, though it probably would have taken me several hours, I knew I could find all the pieces and put them together if I tried.

This is what meditation enables us to do. The method I teach involves choosing a passage from a scripture or great mystic expressing an inspiring ideal that we want to translate into daily life. Then we sit quietly, close our eyes, and go through the words of the passage slowly, with complete concentration, in the mind. This kind of sustained concentration on inspired words day by day drives them deep into consciousness. There they take root and begin to grow, bringing about quiet but wonderful changes in the way we think, act, and live.

The Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi makes a perfect passage to begin with. "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. . . ." Words like these paint a picture we can keep our eyes on throughout the choices of the day, so that little by little we can rearrange the pieces of our lives.

As we learn to do this, boredom disappears. Boredom is intimately connected with lack of purpose, and once you are practicing meditation sincerely and systematically, every moment opens up choices. Each morning you wake up knowing that you can give a good account of yourself and make a contribution to the welfare of people around you. You do not have to ask

whether the day is going to be pleasant or whether you will get your way. You expect difficulties, yet you know you have the capacity to overcome them too. In this kind of confident expectation, where is the room for boredom?

Vitality

Second, meditation brings vibrant health and a flood of vitality. Health here is much more than the absence of disease. Meditation brings not only what researcher Suzanne Kobasa called a "hardy personality," which seems to increase the body's resistance to illness, but also a sense of marvelous wellness in body, mind, and spirit. You feel that everything is essentially right with you, a sense of friendliness around you. Despite its problems, you feel the world is not a hostile place. Nothing can guarantee that the body will be free from problems; it is physical and must obey physical laws. But the vitality, resilience, and endurance that meditation brings can sustain you through even serious physical challenges.

One way in which meditation contributes to health is by relieving stress, to which so many physical and emotional problems are due. Stress is epidemic today; it is hard to imagine escaping it without withdrawing from the world entirely. But if we cannot escape stress, we can surely learn to manage it. With meditation, I would say, we can even learn to thrive on it – for when you know how to face stress with equanimity, it can bring out resources you never suspected.

When I lived in India, banks followed a cardinal rule: until the books were balanced after the day's transactions, no one was allowed to go home. Similarly, we should make it a rule to balance our stress-books every day.

Stress accumulates in all of us; that is the nature of life. Trying to avoid problems and challenges means avoiding life itself. But when stress builds up, it has a dangerous effect on health. If you know how to meditate, you can sit

down for half an hour before going to bed and discharge the stress of that day so you can fall asleep with a clear ledger. Then in the morning you can sit down for another half an hour to relieve any stress that the busy mind has accumulated while you slept.

Meditation improves health in another way too: it brings the understanding and the will to change harmful ways of living. Lifestyle factors like smoking and overeating contribute to many of the health problems we face today. These are stressors we impose on ourselves. I think it was Dr. Paul Dudley White who observed that when we hear the words "heart attack," it sounds as if the heart is attacking us. Not at all, says Dr. White; the heart is a faithful, sturdy old pump. It is we who attack the heart, with weapons like fatty, salty foods, alcohol, and sedentary living. As if that's not enough, we have some invisible weaponry too: anger, resentment, hostility, impatience, jealousy, competitiveness, worry. Even vague problems like a lack of purpose in life can stage incessant attacks, not only on the heart but on other systems of the body as well.

For most of us, however, the most immediate benefit that meditation brings to health is a flood of vitality. Even in the second half of life, morning meditation recharges your batteries so you have a full reservoir of energy to draw on for whatever challenges the day might bring.

It is impossible to exaggerate how valuable this is throughout the span of life. Some scientists today consider it biologically possible for a human being to live one hundred and twenty years or even more. Just imagine! Most of us think we are doing well if we make it through half that period without breaking down. As we creep into our thirties and forties, the machine we call the body naturally begins to develop mechanical problems. Some of these are unavoidable, but many afflictions we associate with

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Continued from previous page old age, including senility, are not at all inevitable. By drawing on meditation, we can stay alert, active, and creative throughout the natural span of our lives. It is then that we come into our legitimate human legacy: long, healthy, hopeful, fulfilling lives.

Fulfillment

This brings a sense of fulfillment that nothing else can offer. Speaking for myself, I have had all the advantages a

person can have in India. I come from a well-respected and very loving family, grew up in a beautiful, prosperous village with loyal friends, received my education from excellent, dedicated teachers, and enjoyed a rewarding career as a writer and professor of English literature. So when I took to meditation, it was not from frustration or lack of confidence or success. The simple truth is that I began to find even the greatest of life's satisfactions not so very satisfying.

A person in this situation becomes aware of a kind of gnawing hunger deep inside, the sort of hunger one does not know how to satisfy. This can take many forms. In my case, until I began to meditate, it used to torment me that although I knew how to teach my students about Spenser and Shaw, I did not know how to teach them what they most needed and wanted to know – how to live. Because they trusted me, they would often come to me to ask about some of life's basic problems. "I

WORDS THAT COME ALIVE

Meditation on an inspirational passage has two important aspects. First, it trains attention, which strengthens concentration and brings the precious capacity to place your attention where you choose – the key to loyalty and love as well as genius. Second, the sustained attention on the lofty ideals presented by an inspirational passage elevates our image of the human being – our image not only of ourselves, but of everyone else as well.

Every inspirational passage I recommend elevates the image of the human being from a purely physical creature to the burning spirit that can forget personal pleasures in contributing to the happiness of the family and the community – a spirit, to use traditional language, made in the image of God.

For this lofty purpose, it is not enough to meditate on words that sound beautiful or wise. To come alive in our consciousness, the words of a meditation passage must meet certain criteria.

Positive

Many elevated passages from all traditions dwell on the negative side of human nature. These flaws are certainly real, but the essence of meditation is that we become what we meditate on. We are trying to strengthen what we can become, not what holds us back, and a negative tone in an otherwise positive passage can cause serious problems when driven deep into the unconscious.

Sometimes, however, we confuse negativity with language we simply don't like. We might wish, for example, that St. Catherine of Genoa would use another word than "sin." But that is like wishing she were more like us, when what we are trying to do in meditation is be more like her.

By and large, I would say, stick to the words of the passage, even if you would like to change them. When you do this, you are expanding what your consciousness can accept. Otherwise, you may find yourself in the situation of Ali Baba in the *Arabian*

Nights, saying, "Open, barley! Open, shredded wheat!" The cave of the heart doesn't open unless you say, "Open, sesame!"

Practical

This requirement eliminates a great deal of beautiful, inspiring poetry and liturgy – full of praise for the Creator, perhaps, but not very helpful in daily living. A meditation passage should help you develop qualities you can put into practice: patience, forgiveness, selflessness, love.

Inspiring

Third, the passage should speak to you. It should be encouraging and meaningful. Not every passage will seem persuasive at first, but surprisingly, as your meditation deepens, words you once found irrelevant may become full of meaning and promise.

Universal

Passages from different mystics and traditions describe the landscape of the spirit from many points of view. This landscape – the mystical experience – is the same everywhere; the diversity of these voices adds to our understanding. For this reason, I recommend drawing on passages from all the world's spiritual traditions. It will not challenge your faith but broaden your outlook. If you prefer to stay with just one tradition, choose passages that speak the universal language of the spirit, regardless of culture or religion.

Authentic

A meditation passage is not ordinary communication. These are living, winged words full of power, backed by the personal experience of a man or woman who has realized the unity of all life. They speak to us directly, heart to heart, from a place where all of us are one.

feel terribly jealous,” one would say. “What should I do?” And I would not have a satisfactory answer. All I could do was quote Shakespeare, which didn’t help.

After many years of training my mind through meditation, however, I began to see that I was gaining access to some deeper source of wisdom. Helpful words would come unbidden from depths I never suspected – the same depths I had been nourishing every day in meditation. In this way I found I was able to help a good many people help themselves, which brought a satisfaction that cannot be gained from any personal achievement.

Mahatma Gandhi used to say something that appealed to me deeply: it is not possible to be completely happy unless everyone in the world is happy. As meditation deepens, you become more aware of sorrow – in the lives of your friends, in a community crisis, even in a tragedy on the other side of the globe. And that sorrow is no longer remote; it is your own.

But at the same time, this deeper sensitivity releases the capacity to help. You find ways to help others solve physical problems, set emotional difficulties right, repair relationships, and forget personal problems in making a lasting contribution to the rest of life. In this way the power of sorrow is harnessed, and the deep gnawing hunger I spoke of begins to be relieved.

This is a strange commingling – joy in the unity of life, sorrow wherever this unity is violated. Together these two release determined, selfless, nonviolent action to establish love where there is hatred, trust where there is suspicion, peace where there is war.

These three benefits are not really separate. They can be expressed in a single sentence: a full, vibrant, creative life in the service of others is our birthright as human beings. That is the promise of meditation. ⇨

A Seed Grows

IT WAS the summer of 1969, and twenty-something Linda Patterson was living and working in Oakland, California, trying to figure out what to do with her life. “I’d dropped out of college in my third year, and, young though I was, I’d already burned out as a political activist. To make matters worse, I tried to improve myself by reading dark existentialist novels,” she remembers with a groan. “I had no idea what was good for me.

“But I had a strong desire to really make something of my life,” Linda recalls. “I decided to go back to school to become a nurse. First, though, I needed to raise my grades. State university policies gave me the wonderful opportunity of doing that by taking any of the classes offered through an extension program. One of the courses that caught my eye was ‘Theory and Practice of Meditation,’ taught by Eknath Easwaran.”

Linda enrolled in the class, which proved to be a remarkable departure from her earlier college courses. The professor in particular was unlike any other teacher – or person – she’d known. “From the beginning, I was very curious about him,” she says, “as, in a way, I still am.

“He was very one-pointed always, just as you see him in his videos. And from what I remember, he didn’t refer to written material when he taught; there was nothing that came between him and us. Everything he said seemed extemporaneous, yet so coherent and organized. I had never even heard of the Upanishads or the other scriptures he quoted from, but suddenly he would come out with these sonorous lines, perhaps first in Sanskrit and then in translation. Those verses seemed so pure, their message so concentrated, it was almost like a thunderbolt.

“I remember thinking, ‘Here is a person who has been to places I haven’t.’ He seemed to be reporting back from some inner world I knew little about, yet something made me trust him. I suppose I’d always been searching for that world, but in a haphazard, not overtly spiritual, way. Easwaran gave me my first real glimpse of it, and that made an enormous impact on me.

“At that point,” she recalls, “I started meditating along the lines he suggested. ‘It’s no good meditating just once a week in class,’ Easwaran would tell us. ‘You have to do it every morning.’ And so I did.”

A matter of time

As deeply as the course and the professor affected Linda, however, after the semester’s end she began to drift away from her practice of the Eight Point Program. “I could see that something inside had begun to heal slowly through the meditation, but even so, there was a bit of me that was uncommitted and ambivalent – and a little rebellious too,” she adds. “That remained true over much of my life.

“But even when I fell away and tried other things, the seeds were there. The impact had done its work,” she says.

Finally, the time came for the seeds to germinate. “When I reached my early fifties, I began to feel that time was getting shorter and something had to change,” Linda recalls. With a growing sense of urgency about preparing for her future years, Linda found that her desire for spiritual depth became stronger than her desire for variety and exploration. “At that point, I chose Easwaran’s approach, and I made a commitment to practice it every day.”

Now, eight years later, Linda is the coordinator of a BMCM fellowship group that she started in England, where she lives currently. Her early struggles, she feels, are useful to her as she introduces and explains the Eight Points to new

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Continued from previous page meditators. Playing an active role in continuing Easwaran's work has helped her deepen her own commitment to her practice. "I've gained so many benefits from introducing Easwaran's program to people in my area who are interested in joining the fellowship group. Now I have these amazing people to learn with, to multiply all our efforts together. It is the most meaningful time of my week, and I'm greatly devoted to it."

Tastes of freedom

Linda's spiritual practice over these last eight years has been filled with victories small and big, from kicking some less-than-healthy eating habits to overcoming paralyzing anxiety about retirement. "I've found the meditation to be so strengthening and underpinning," she says.

Recently, her practice received a fresh boost of energy and enthusiasm after she flew across the Atlantic to attend a retreat in Tomales. Upon returning home, it wasn't difficult for Linda to find places to put that extra verve to work. "For a long time, I'd been having an internal struggle about listening to the radio. I don't own a television, but I must have five radios in a tiny little house. When I get up to feed the cat, it's almost second nature to turn on the radio. When I go to get something to eat, it comes along."

There were entertaining, uplifting programs on the radio, but other ones too, and Linda realized that she was listening indiscriminately, primarily for the constant chatter in the background.

"After the retreat, I tackled the mindless radio habit with renewed vigor. I put Easwaran's picture and lit-

tle signs saying 'mantram' in front of the radios so that I wouldn't turn them on automatically. When I did decide to tune in, often what was being said made me uncomfortable or seemed unkind. Because I was paying more attention, I'd notice, and I'd turn the radio off. That might not seem like much, but we're talking



After first meeting Easwaran when she was in her twenties, Linda Patterson reconnected with the Eight Point Program eight years ago. Most recently, she says, her practice has brought her "a wonderful calmness, but also the exhilarating sense of being able to do things I haven't done before."

about a new thing here!" she says with satisfaction.

"Since the house has been quieter, I've noticed that I'm more peaceful, focused, and slowed down in general," she reports. "In so many areas of my life, I'm now able to recognize what I'm doing and to see that I have choices. Then I have the wonderful opportunity to decide what is best, in dozens of little ways: remembering to say grace before a meal, remembering to repeat my mantram before I pick up the phone or when I'm walking. The

mantram is kicking in by itself more and more," she observes. "Finally, I've been able to be more regular about my evening meditation, which had been somewhat sporadic. It's all going very well so far."

Reaching for the sky

After the retreat, Linda took a week off work to recover from jet lag and consolidate the spiritual progress she'd made. The latter proved to be a bit more challenging than she had anticipated. "When I started back at work on Monday, it was like a ferocious wind hit me, and I had to really work at not being blown over. That wind was all my old habits again, all the old stresses. It's a renewed struggle now that I'm even more aware of those habits than before."

It's these blustery times that remind Linda what ultimately drew her back to the Eight Points, she says. "Over the years, I'd seen how hard it was to sustain a spiritual life in this world today without supportive measures in addition to the meditation. It's a bit like Gothic architecture: you really need those buttresses to hold yourself up so you can reach for the sky without getting flattened. The Eight Points do that, especially the mantram,

which is super-duper buttressing. Each one of the points supports us in a different way, whether by reinvigorating, inspiring, challenging, or relaxing us. We are bolstered from all sides."

It's this very stability, Linda is discovering, that opens up new areas for exploration and discovery. "As my practice gradually peels away the deeper meaning of each of those disciplines, it's a continuing revelation. I never see it all; I never finish with it," she says. "With every day, there's more to learn, and that's a wonderful thing." ☺

A Vital Connection

OVER THE three decades that Jim Garrett had been practicing dentistry, his technical expertise continued to evolve, but one stubborn problem hadn't gotten any easier to handle. Every workday brought times when he felt ill at ease, but the reason remained a mystery. "For years and years, I didn't understand quite what the problem was. I just knew that the environment was tough for me and that dentistry was a difficult and stressful thing to do."

Eventually, Jim discovered a connection between this vague negative feeling and the emotional state of the person sitting in his chair. "The majority of patients that you see as a dentist are somewhere on a continuum between mild apprehension and outright terror," he explains. "As they would get more and more apprehensive, I would get more and more frustrated and disturbed. I can't tell you what the mechanism is, but I know those mental states can be contagious."

This insight alone, however, didn't solve his problem. "I could never get used to the tension," he says. "Since thirty years of experience didn't help, I figured that's just the way dentistry was and there wasn't anything you could do about it."

Then, two and a half years ago, Jim developed an interest in spirituality and started researching meditation. A friend told him about Easwaran, and together they came to the BMCM's Tuesday night program. "I liked the

discussion very much," Jim remembers, "because it was about things that really mattered to me. Afterward, I started asking myself questions like 'Am I going to allow my mind to think whatever it wants and just go along for the ride, or am I going to get some control over it?'" He decided to give the Eight Point Program a try.



In meditation, Jim Garrett says he has found a powerful way to remove unwanted thoughts and behaviors. "If you pick any human frailty, you can find a meditation passage on how to overcome it. And if you meditate on that passage, it transforms you. Even after meditating for only a couple of weeks, if you're able to see just one small positive change, it's very motivating," he says. "I was able to see that."

A new phenomenon

"I'd been meditating diligently every morning and often at night for about six months," recalls Jim, "when I experienced a new phenomenon with one of my patients.

"Out of all the things I face in dentistry, from fixing broken-off root tips to trying to find a canal in a tooth, far and away the toughest situation is a young child who needs a lot of dental work. It's not uncommon for a five-year-old or even a three-year-old to

have multiple decayed teeth needing major work, even extractions. Working at a clinic in a rural area where there hasn't been much emphasis on dental education, I see this a lot.

"This particular day, a small boy came in hurting, and something needed to be done. Naturally, though, he was resistant to having a needle put

in his mouth. Who wants that thing in there? But I think the mother was embarrassed that her son wasn't cooperating, because she started yelling at him. This made the boy – and me – more agitated.

"Usually, this type of situation would just get to be like a cyclone, going round and round in a circle of anxiety and tension until no amount of local anesthetic was going to help.

"But this day, suddenly I didn't feel that I was involved in their emotional states; they weren't affecting me. For the first time, I had the ability to step away completely from the frenzy of their minds to make decisions from a calm mental state. And if there's one thing you really need with an apprehensive patient, it's a calm mind. That's probably the best anesthetic there is."

Since then, Jim's newfound composure has opened up a broader spectrum of possibilities for helping his patients feel

more relaxed. "If I can stay calm," he says, "I can see a lot more options." One is simply to communicate. "The procedure might be something I can talk to the child about and explain." Occasionally, as in the case of the boy and his mother, Jim offers the parents ideas about how to help their children through this time in the dental chair.

When his mind is unperturbed, Jim can also perceive how to make the best use of time. "If the child is very anxious, I can seldom get the

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page work done that day. If there is pain also, I can often get rid of it with an antibiotic. Then I can see them again when they're not in pain, and that makes dealing with the problem much easier."

Jim says that by slowing down the pace of the procedures to match what his patients are ready for, he's seen excellent results. "If you force yourself on a kid, a lot of times you've created a dental-phobic for life. So sometimes I perform something that's very easy, staying away from the really difficult stuff that's going to be coming up later. If I can win their trust, I can do great things."

Paradoxically, Jim points out, this distance from his patients' mental states has actually allowed him to feel closer to them. "I have a lot more empathy now. I know how awful it can be to have to put up with all the sounds, vibrations, and strange sensations. I've sure become a much kinder person in general, and my patients are the main beneficiaries."

Where to save, where to spend

Another change Jim has seen with meditation pertains to his overall mood and energy levels. In years past, he says, his life would slip into the doldrums from time to time. He discovered that running every day brought him an infusion of energy and a brighter outlook. "But it didn't really come together," he says, "until the last couple of years with the Eight Points.

"I really like running to the mantram now, and meditation has given me yet another layer of insulation from those periods. My thoughts generally stay positive and upbeat instead of focusing on worries. Meditation is absolutely critical to my energy levels."

Once he understood the connections among meditation, positive thinking, and vitality, Jim was moti-

vated to take a closer look at other choices he was making. "Through the meditation, I'm learning to conserve my energy so that it goes much further. For example, recently I haven't been getting embroiled in energy-wasting arguments as much, whether to defend my views or to try to talk others out of theirs.

"Sometimes, these discussions would start out very innocuously, with someone giving an opinion about a sports-related controversy in the papers. I'd find myself launching into a twenty-minute debate about it. The whole thing was unnecessary. These days, if I have an opinion about those things, I keep it to myself. I've seen that if I don't spend all that time defending my views, I save a whole lot of energy."

What does Jim do with the vitality he conserves? "Now the things I choose to devote my energy to are much more worthwhile," he says. It's a shorter list of things, and each one receives more energy and attention. As a result, he explains, "I do them with a higher level of enthusiasm, and that's much more satisfying."

Lately, Jim has been pouring energy into his personal relationships, both with people in his community and closer to home. "I thought about what a highlight it is when my kids call me," he says of his twenty-year-old twins. "So now I pay more attention to my dad. I'll call him several times a week, and I'm finding that I understand him much better than I ever did before. At the end of our conversation, he'll say, 'Well, thank you, James, for phoning. It means so much to me.'"

A way of life

Jim sees himself as a work in progress, with plenty of things he'd still like to improve, yet he's confident that meditation will help him overcome whatever habits stand between him and his goals. "If I take a passage, memorize it, and meditate on it, I can change my

hardwiring. I think that *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* is one of the most important books ever put out there, because it has so much good spiritual information in it. Meditating on any one of those passages – and there are multitudes of them in there – can only improve my outlook in life."

Of course, Jim says, remaking oneself from the inside out takes continuous effort. "Meditating on Swami Ramdas's 'The Central Truth,' I'll get down to the tail end, where it says, 'God's help comes only through concentration.' That reminds me that I've got to work at this thing, not just in meditation, but throughout the day with the mantram and the other points. I don't see the Eight Point Program as a set of disciplines only; it's really a way of life. Sometimes, following it means that I have to go against the flow of what I see around me and make different choices."

Often, he says, the passages come to mind during the day to support him in these choices and remind him where he's headed. "One of my favorite passages is the 'Twin Verses,' from the Dhammapada of the Buddha. It compares what will happen if we're selfish and if we're selfless. The results are tough to argue with, because my personal experience bears them out. Maybe I wouldn't have had the opportunity to figure that out if I hadn't tried every possible means to be happy the first way," he says with a laugh.

"Meditation, the mantram, and putting others first weren't on that long list of things I'd tried. Lo and behold, if I approach the program with diligence, it really does work. Fortunately, Easwaran always emphasizes that it's a gradual process, so I never expected my life would be instantly transformed. But I can see a big difference from where I was when I started. Already, my practice has given me some of the results the Buddha talks about: much more lasting joy in my life." ⇨

Overcoming Fear

FOR QUITE a while, F.J. Lucchino had been feeling restless. Working as an attorney at the large law firm was not a good fit for him; the long hours and tense, competitive atmosphere were exacting a heavy toll. “I’ve got to find a way to get my life going in a different direction,” he remembers saying to himself one August day in 1999. “That was when my search began.”

F.J.’s pursuit of a new approach to life soon led him to books on Eastern religion. Before long he was practicing a form of meditation regularly. He left the law firm and found another position, but some of his restlessness went with him. For two more years his spiritual search continued.

“Despite my efforts in meditation,” says F.J., “I wasn’t making much progress because I didn’t really know what I was doing. Finally, I started wondering, ‘How am I going to find someone here in Pennsylvania who can teach me?’ I wanted someone reputable, someone with personal experience.

“My birthday was coming up, and I had asked my wife for a copy of the Upanishads. The translation she brought home was by a man I’d never heard of, Eknath Easwaran. I started in on the introduction and found it tremendous, exhilarating. I couldn’t wait to get his book on how to meditate.

“I found a copy of *Meditation*, and in the first few pages I read, ‘This is the kind of manual I had wanted when I was learning to meditate, but could never find.’ Well, I’m glad you wrote it,

I thought, because this is just the book I’ve been looking for. And I’ve been following his Eight Point Program every day since.”

A new direction

By the next summer, F.J. had begun to discern some ways to reorient his life. First, he decided to open his own pri-



For several years, F.J. Lucchino was searching for a direction in life. Now that he has a goal in view, he’s able to keep his bearings, even while making substantial changes. “Whenever I have a difficult decision,” he says, “I ask myself, what is going to be best for my spiritual practice? It’s not immediately obvious what the answer is, but I have that polestar, that guide. The answer will come eventually.”

vate law practice from the third floor of his home. This would, if all went well, allow him to continue to support his family while maintaining greater control over his career and spiritual life. “I also wanted to be able to have dinner with my wife and children,” says F.J., who is father to a nine-year-old, a seven-year-old, and five-year-old twins. “Even if I had to work in the evening, I could still go downstairs for a meal with the family almost every night.”

Second, for some time F.J. had

wanted to find a way to help people in his community who needed a lawyer’s help but had zero or low income. He decided to establish a free, monthly legal clinic in the inner city, donating his own time and skills and recruiting other volunteer lawyers to do the same.

Challenges real and imagined

These visions for the future, of course, were only a beginning. There were plenty of obstacles, internal and external, to overcome. “Out of the three poisons that Easwaran mentions, fear, greed, and anger,” explains F.J., “the biggest one for me has always been fear. As a real worrier, I’m much more comfortable sticking with what’s familiar, even if it’s not fulfilling. Starting a solo practice while supporting a family of six was a big leap for me, and I’d never tried to build a new volunteer organization from the ground up.”

F.J. knew he was taking real risks, but he was determined not to let the anxiety hold him back. “While not all my fears were baseless, I had observed my mind’s habit of creating these hobgoblins: terrible things that could go wrong, ways that I could fail. Meditation, the mantram, and the other points had helped me deal with those anxious thoughts in other situations, and that gave me the faith and confidence that I

could face the challenges that came my way without getting burned out. Otherwise,” F.J. reflects, “I don’t think I would have had the courage or the motivation to undertake either change, let alone both of them.”

With this initial mental hurdle cleared, things began falling into place. F.J. soon had his law practice set up and was assisting a growing network of clients. The clinic also slowly started taking shape. “I met another lawyer who had a similar

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page aspiration and we spent about six months researching and figuring out how to go about it.” Then a nonprofit downtown agreed to donate some of their space once a month for three hours in the evening, and one of their employees offered to take care of scheduling the clients. “The space was nice and fairly convenient for volunteer lawyers coming from downtown firms.”

Building a bond

Before long, the clinic was up and running. As F.J. began meeting with these new clients, he found the work both rewarding and challenging. “Some of the people who brought cases to us were angry and frustrated; others were feeling hopeless. Discussions got pretty emotional at times.”

In these instances, F.J. found it particularly effective to listen to his clients with the same degree of concentration he uses in meditation. “I try to practice that with all of my clients, and they tend to really appreciate and respond to it.” It’s a skill he has encountered endless opportunities to hone. “If I’m reading the newspaper and one of my kids asks me a question, I try to put the paper aside, give my full attention to my child, and only afterwards go back to my reading. That simple thing has, I believe, helped me to develop what I think is a wonderful relationship with my kids.” Even with people he doesn’t know well, this approach can help lower barriers and build trust. “I certainly think that there’s a bond that develops when you are really focused on another person. If you are intent on what’s happening right then, your guard drops, and that helps the other person do the same.”

There’s a great need for that kind of interaction at the clinic, says F.J. “Some of the people who come in are just thankful to have a lawyer willing to sit down with them and listen to what they have to say. Even though the legal problem is rarely the biggest one they’re facing, addressing it can help

them get control over their lives and might be necessary for making progress in other areas.”

A continuing process

Now that the clinic has been operational for eighteen months, F.J. has learned that the challenges never really go away. One way or another, though, he finds the resources to meet them – sometimes unexpectedly. “The cases that come in through the clinic turn out to be predominantly family law cases: dealing with divorce, child custody, and child or spousal support. In the early days we had almost no family law volunteers. I think they know how difficult those cases can be, and they’re not always eager to take on more, especially after working on them all day.

“We set up various methods of trying to address that, but when they didn’t seem to be working, my worries came back. At one point I found myself lying down on my bed thinking, ‘What did you take on? How are you going to deal with all of this?’ My mantram was especially helpful during that time.

“Within a day or two, I got a surprise phone call from the head of the family law section of the local bar association. ‘I can help you recruit some family lawyers,’ she offered. And the clinic has just been like that, with people popping up out of nowhere to help.

“We’re still working on getting more volunteers and it’s not easy, but we’re making progress. The Eight Point Program hasn’t let me down yet. That’s not to say there has never been a time when I have felt concerned or even a little strung out – if a volunteer lawyer cancels at the last minute or something else falls through – but I never say, ‘Oh, I can’t keep doing this.’

“Maybe the greatest comfort,” F.J. reflects, “has come from one of my meditation passages, written by a Catholic mystic, St. Francis de Sales:

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 unflinching strength to bear it. Be at peace then, and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations.

“I’ve seen that if I keep trying my hardest at my meditation practice, I am shielded from many of the negative things that could happen, even though I make mistakes. And I somehow find the strength to make it through the problems that actually do come about.

“Incidentally,” F.J. points out, “although I attended Catholic schools and returned to that faith five years ago, it was only after discovering Easwaran that I learned of St. Francis de Sales and some other Christian mystics. My practice of the Eight Points, particularly meditation and spiritual reading, has given me a fuller appreciation and experience of the tradition in which I was brought up.”

The end of restlessness?

What about that restlessness – have these changes cured it? “There is still restlessness,” answers F.J., “but it’s not the same kind. Before it was a restlessness of searching for a path, for some direction to my life. Now I have a path; I have direction.

“The restlessness I feel now has been called the ‘patient impatience’ of wanting to keep moving closer to the goal. Sometimes there’s a sense of restlessness when I want to progress faster, but I do what I can to stay motivated without putting unnecessary pressure on myself. Practically, this means trying to focus on one of the Eight Points rather than asking myself, ‘How am I doing?’ The more I can get my fears, anxiety, and expectations out of the way, the closer I can become to what Easwaran calls ‘a force for peace.’

“I’m still curious about how my life is going to unfold,” F.J. says, “but I know what’s going to help it unfold in the best way. And that’s enough.” ☞

A JOURNEY LIKE NO OTHER

“He doesn’t tell us what to do; he doesn’t ask us to do more; no, he tells us stories. And when we feel his kindness and depth in those stories, we can’t help but ask a bit more of ourselves.”

– Author and business columnist Dale Dauten, on why he named *Climbing the Blue Mountain* one of the “Five Greatest Advice Books of all Time.”



“No matter what our problems or liabilities, every one of us can attain these heights.”

– EKNATH EASWARAN

PETER THE PENGUIN made his first splash in a set of fifteen essays written for those in search of life’s greatest adventure: *Climbing the Blue Mountain*.

Julie MacLean first discovered this collection about twenty years ago, under its previous title, *The Supreme Ambition*. “I was in my twenties,” she remembers, “fresh out of school and ready to conquer the world, at least the business world. Wandering through a bookstore after work, I spied *The Supreme Ambition*. This must be the book for me, I thought.

“Then, at the bottom of the cover I noticed a little subtitle: *Life’s goal and how to reach it*. Of course, I thought I knew what life’s goal was. I had already found a great job and was traveling worldwide, sharing the wisdom of my university education with anyone who would listen.

“I opened the book and soon I was mesmerized. This simple little book of stories resonated so much with me – it was as if I heard the deepest part of myself speaking. I read on and on, soaking up word after word, watching my ambitions shrink down to their real, comparatively puny, size. I looked again at the cover of the book and I realized that Easwaran’s ambition for me was so much

bigger than the one I had for myself. Not only that, but he also had a method that I could follow, a practical way for me to take small steps toward reaching life’s goal.

“By the end of the book, I knew that I had in Easwaran’s writings everything that I would need to go forward and pursue my real ambition – the ambition that he said I could achieve, that I was born to achieve.

“Then, sheepishly, I put the book back on my bookshelf. I knew that I was not ready. I was young and I had many desires. Over the years I continued to pursue these desires, to test them, to see what they had to offer. In my quiet times I would once again pull this book off the bookshelf, reread it, and sigh to myself. But ten years after first opening the book, I started the meditation practice that has become the foundation of the joyful pursuit of my life’s ‘supreme ambition.’”



“Climbing the Blue Mountain is often the first book I turn to for inspiration and motivation,” says Joan Barnicle. “Easwaran is so compassionate in the way he looks at difficulties and practical in the solutions he offers. ‘The House of the Mind,’ for example, is a very funny, brilliantly crafted chapter that helps us look at daily challenges with a sense of humor. He shows that many problems, such as anger, are mechanical ones, which means that they can be solved if we understand the workings of our mind. To me, that’s precious.”

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August 19: Denver One-Day

September 15–17: Chicago Weekend

September 16: Chicago One-Day

November 4: Sacramento One-Day

Visit our Web site
for more details
about our books
and retreats
www.easwaran.org

Retreats in Europe*

June 10: Lewes, U.K.

June 17: Voorschoten, the Netherlands

* These retreats offer an introductory session for beginners.

Free Public Program Every Tuesday Evening

In Petaluma, California Every Tuesday evening we offer a free program beginning with a workshop at 7:00 p.m., followed by a videotaped talk by Eknath Easwaran at 8:00 and a half hour of meditation ending by 9:00. This program is held at the United Church of Christ, 825 Middlefield Drive, Petaluma, California. Directions:

Traveling either north or south on Highway 101, take the Petaluma Boulevard South exit. Drive 1.2 miles north into Petaluma. Turn left at the first stoplight; this is McNear Street. Drive 1 block, turn right on Mission, drive 1 block, and turn left on Middlefield. The church parking lot is on your left, a half block up