



Blue Mountain

ESTABLISHED BY EKNATH EASWARAN
FOR PRESENTING HIS EIGHT-POINT
PROGRAM OF PASSAGE MEDITATION

Learning to Love

By Eknath Easwaran

MANY YEARS ago, after Mother Teresa achieved world recognition for her work in India, she came to visit the West. It wasn't long before she delivered a surprise: she had decided to extend her work to the United States, starting missions in New York and elsewhere – including, eventually, San Francisco.

At the time, the Bay Area met Mother Teresa's announcement with shock. After all, this was Mother Teresa of Calcutta, not San Francisco. We knew the third world needed her, but this was the first world. What could someone like Mother Teresa have seen here that warranted placing San Francisco in the same category as Delhi, Colombo, and Addis Ababa?

I have never forgotten the answer she gave. "There is hunger for ordinary bread," she explained, "and there is hunger for love, for kindness, for thoughtfulness; and this is the great poverty that makes people suffer so much."

In every human being, she was reminding us, there is a deep need for love – not only to be loved, but to give love as well. This need is written in our hearts. It is part of what we are as human

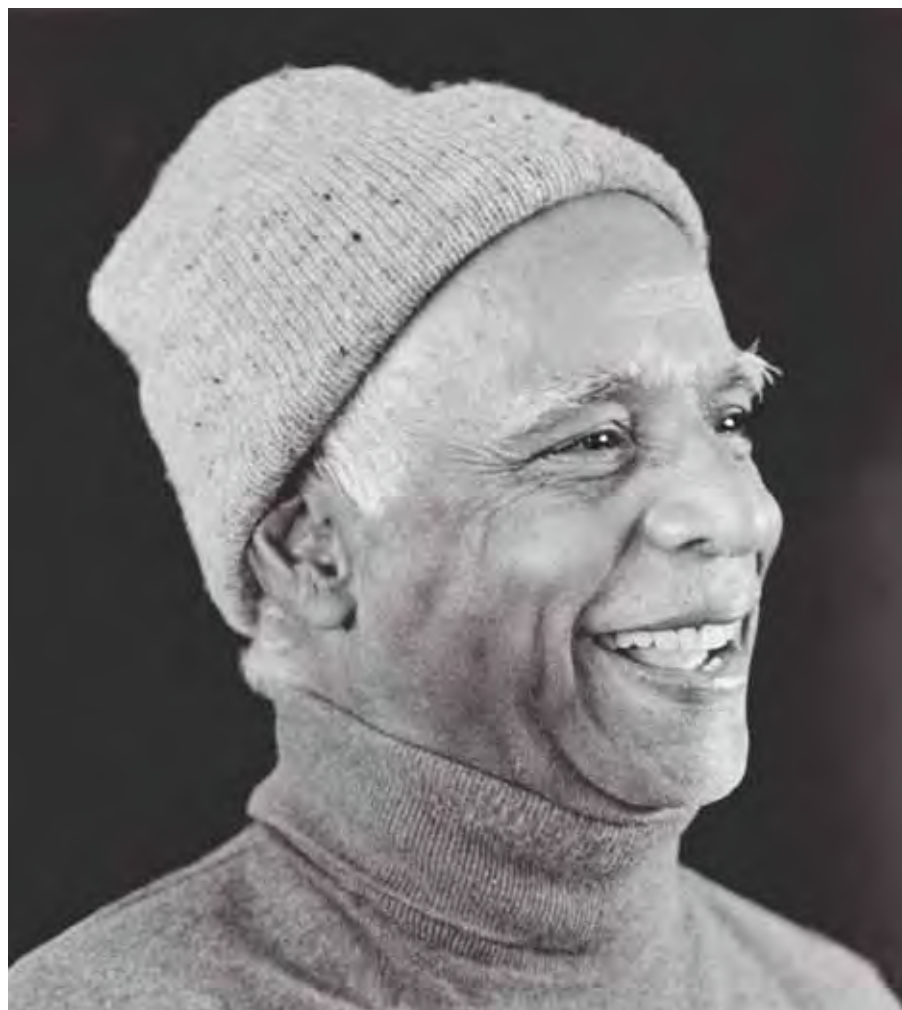
beings, an inner necessity every bit as real as our need for food and drink.

All the world's great religions explain this in the same way. We need to love, they tell us, because love is our real nature. "The soul is made of love," says Mechthild of Magdeburg, "and must ever strive to return to love. Therefore, it can never find rest nor happiness in other things. It must lose itself in love."

Once we grasp the sense of these quiet statements, they can change our lives forever. They mean that being able to love fully, unconditionally, is our native state. We cannot lose this native capacity, cannot get rid of it even if we try. The most we can manage to do is cut ourselves off

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Below, from our archives: Eknath Easwaran.



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.

For more about the eight-point program of passage meditation, visit www.easwaran.org/eight

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Blue Mountain Center of Meditation

The Center offers instruction in meditation and allied living skills, following the eight-point program of passage meditation 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.

Passage Meditation: An Eight-Point Program

- 1. MEDITATION ON A PASSAGE** Silent repetition in the mind of memorized inspirational passages from the world's great religions. Practiced for one-half hour each morning.
- 2. REPETITION OF A 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 FELLOWSHIP** Spending time regularly with other passage meditators for mutual inspiration and support.
- 8. SPIRITUAL READING** Drawing inspiration from writings by and about the world's great spiritual figures and from the scriptures of all religions.

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.

We Welcome Your Help

The Blue Mountain Center depends on donations to carry on its work. Every gift, large or small, is much appreciated and put to good use.

The Blue Mountain Center of Meditation is a 501(c)(3) California nonprofit corporation. Contributions to the Center are deductible from state and federal income tax.

Turning an Obstacle into an Opportunity



Christine Easwaran

EKNATH EASWARAN wrote the words for our lead article at a time when this country and the world were in a state of greater affluence, driven by a consumer society. But his words – and those of Mother Teresa which he quotes – are even more relevant today.

Necessity is bringing us back to our communities, back to our homes and families, back to a more personal life-style. Now we have no choice; we must simplify. But we can make it an opportunity. We can respond in a creative manner, even with joy.

Easwaran grew up in a large joint family in a small village in South India, where life was very personal, and all his life he maintained personal ways of interacting with people. This was one way he demonstrated his love, but he always advised using discrimination. “You show your love for the postman in a different way than for your family, for example.”

Easwaran quotes Mother Teresa as saying that every human being has a deep need not only to be loved but, even more, to give love, and he offers a surprising prescription for how to learn to love – not always an easy task in today’s impersonal society dominated by technology. The elements of

his prescription are: time, attention, energy, discrimination, and awareness of the unity of life. The role of caregiver calls for large amounts of each of these. We are pleased to bring you on page seven an example of how this can work.

Along with the use of the mantram, a meditation passage to fit the situation can be of significant help to a

caregiver. As an aid in memorizing, we include in this issue the instructions we give at our retreats. If you have any other tips or suggestions for memorizing, we would be pleased to hear from you.

Christine Easwaran

For the Board of Trustees

I have been asked to say a few words about the financial crisis through which we are passing at present. My heart is full of sympathy and support for those people who have suffered serious losses. I do hope that the situation will stabilize itself soon. But I do not agree with all these financial experts and economic commentators who seem to think the world has crashed around our ears. Nothing of the kind.

We haven't lost our capacity to love. We haven't lost our capacity to work hard to change the political, economic, and social order to be free from these ups and downs, which are the very nature of a profit-oriented society. I am not in favor of poverty. But I am in favor of simplicity. I would like to ask people everywhere, especially in this country, to free themselves from these ups and downs by cultivating a simpler mode of living – comfortable, artistic, and not at the expense of the environment.

– EKNATH EASWARAN

Speaking after the worldwide stock market crash of October 1987

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from it, burying it under layer after layer of the self-centered conditioning that accumulates so easily in the modern world. But that conditioning can be removed, and when it is removed, what remains is our original goodness – a capacity for love that is, in principle, without limit.

At bottom, the promise of every personal relationship is to open up this wellspring deep in our hearts. We aren't often aware of this promise, of course. We think of love as an emotional or even biochemical need that can be satisfied by something outside us. But as Mechthild says, it is a need of the soul rather than of the body – of our inmost self. In other words, our hunger for love is really spiritual.

We can think of Mother Teresa as a perfect physician. She puts a thermometer to modern industrial civilization, checks its blood pressure, and gives her diagnosis without hesitation: "Acute spiritual malnutrition." But malnutrition is reversible. Just as negative emotions like anger, fear, and greed have great power to harm, positive emotions have power to heal. And Mother Teresa knows what to prescribe: good will, patience, over-riding love for all.

Usually a good physician will not write a prescription without some accompanying instructions – plenty of rest, lots of fluids, and so on. Certain conditions have to be followed for the prescription to be most effective. Similarly, if love is prescribed as the remedy, we need five things. The first is time. Second is control over our attention. Third comes energy, vitality. Fourth, we need discrimination. And fifth, we must have awareness of the unity of life.

Time

"Everybody today seems to be in such a terrible rush," observes Mother Teresa, "anxious for greater developments and greater riches and so on, so

that children have very little time for their parents. Parents have very little time for each other, and in the home begins the disruption of the peace of the world."

An obsession with time has been so worked into our social system that we scarcely notice that we have left no time to love. Everywhere the slogan is Hurry, Hurry, Hurry. Yet to be aware of the needs of others, to speak and act with patience and consideration, we must have time.

On the one hand, this is a matter of simplifying our lives, dropping less

time enough to eat leisurely, to talk with others at the table, and to get to work five or ten minutes early so that you can chat a little with your co-workers.

Eating leisurely is especially important where children are concerned. They are not only assimilating their oatmeal; they are absorbing everything they see and hear. It is a great disservice to try to hurry them through a meal. We need to give them time to ask questions that cannot be answered, to tell stories punctuated by long pauses while they search for a

particular word, even to upset a glass of milk, and still get off to school on time; all this is part of a loving breakfast.

We can learn to direct attention where we choose.

important activities in order to allow more time for what matters most. But it is also essential to slow down our pace of living, so that we can free ourselves from the time-driven thinking and behavior characteristic of modern life.

One of the most effective steps to take here is simple: get up early. If you wake up late, rush through breakfast, run for the bus, and reach your office ten minutes after everyone else has settled down, that is the pace you are going to maintain throughout the day. It is not only inimical to health; it is also inimical to happiness. When we rush, we cannot even see people; they are just phantoms. We are too much in a hurry to catch the little signs in a person's eyes or around the corners of the mouth which say, "You're stepping on my feelings. You're letting me down." All the mind can think of is "What I have to do, and how little time I have to do it."

When people ask how they can learn to love more, therefore, I sometimes say enigmatically, "Get up earlier." Allow plenty of time for your full meditation, and then come to breakfast not only with an appetite but with time –

Attention

Slowing down is closely connected with one-pointed attention: doing one thing at a time, and doing it with complete attention. In the case of rushing, for example, the problem is not only one of speed. Our attention is riveted on ourselves – our needs, our deadlines, our desires – so there is no attention to give to those around us, who probably have needs and desires and deadlines very much like our own.

Through practicing meditation and giving full concentration to one thing at a time, we can learn to direct attention where we choose. This is an almost miraculous skill, with applications to the practice of love that are as simple as they are essential. When we can give complete attention to the person we are with, even if she is contradicting our opinions on tax reform or explaining the peculiarities of Roman law, boredom disappears from our relationships. People are not boring; we get bored because our attention wanders. Giving someone our full attention says clearly, "You matter to me. You have my respect."

Attention is very much like a dog. Some years ago my friend Steve

acquired a large, affectionate, and utterly blithe-spirited retriever pup whom his son named Ganesha. Ganesha had a lot of energy, and he had never been trained; he was accustomed to doing whatever he liked. If you put him in the yard, he would dig under the fence. Leave him in the bedroom and he would chew up your slippers. Take him for a walk and in a minute he would be halfway across a field chasing a deer. So Steve started to train him. For a while, I thought it was the other way around: Ganesha would bark and then Steve would run after him. But now, after a lot of patient practice, Ganesha has learned to heel and to expend his energy on a fast run at the beach instead of on bedroom slippers.

Attention can be trained in a very similar way. At first it wanders restlessly all over, looking into everything and everybody. But if we put it on a short leash and recall it many, many times, the great day will come when it will heel and obey. Then it becomes an alert, invaluable companion – very much like a well-trained sheepdog, which I have seen follow all kinds of complicated instructions. Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that there is no limit to the degree to which attention can be trained. That is how responsive it is.

Almost every disruption in human relationships – between parent and child, man and woman, friend and friend, worker and co-worker – can be prevented by learning control over attention; for with attention comes loyalty, interest, desire, trust. I can illustrate with the most fascinating of relationships: the romantic. Suppose *Romeo and Juliet* had turned out differently, and the two lovers had married and settled down to a normal domestic life. After a few years, as sometimes happens, Romeo's attention gets restless, and Juliet loses her attraction. Once the very sight of her made him think of flowers and bubbling brooks and the "light, sweet airs of

spring"; now she just reminds him of the laundry and his morning espresso. Once he used to hang on her every word; now he answers everything with "Fine" and "Have a nice day." After a while his attention falls on Rosaline, his old flame. Now she reminds him of flowers and brooks; his attention grabs on to her and will not let go.

If he could read what most of us read today, the advice he would get is, "Follow your desires. That is where happiness will be." But that is precisely where unhappiness will be. If Romeo's attention cannot stay with Juliet, how is it going to stay with Rosaline? After all, Juliet is the same Juliet, no less attractive than before. But Romeo is also the same Romeo. If he cannot get control over his attention, happiness can only get farther and farther away.

The moment you hear the brook babbling and start thinking about spring, withdraw your attention completely from Rosaline and focus it on Juliet. With practice, we can focus our attention by choice just as intensely as it is focused by first love. Then Romeo will find that every day with Juliet is as sweet as the first. Every morning he will be able to exclaim with fresh wonder, "It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!" And the love between them will grow deeper and richer every day. As Teresa of Avila says, *Amor saca amor*: love draws out love.

Energy

To love, we have to be able to do things for others, even if it is inconvenient. We have to be able to do things we do not like even when we seem to have no will-power or energy. How can we get more energy, so that we can give more love?

When people ask me this, I usually point out, "You already have a lot of energy." As far as human beings are concerned, there is no real energy crisis. All of us have vast amounts of vitality. But we fritter it away, letting it flow out wastefully through one hundred and one channels.

Here again, there is a close connection with attention. Energy drains out when we let the mind go on working, repeating the same thought over and over. I have seen learned names for this phenomenon too, but I would compare it simply with a broken record. The mind is playing one of its little tunes – "Roses are red, violets are blue, Tchaikovsky is great and so are you" – and all of a sudden it is "Tchaikovsky, Tchaikovsky, Tchaikovsky . . ." That is all that most guilt complexes amount to, most compulsive memories, most resentments, most obsessions: sitting there like the little dog listening obediently to "His Master's Voice" while the same old thought goes round and round and round. There is no serious mental malady here, only a minor mechanical problem. When we know how to meditate well, if the mind slips into a negative groove, we can lift it up gently and set it down on something positive.

This is not turning away from problems or playing Pollyanna. It is simply good energy conservation. Whatever problems we might have, dwelling on them is only going to magnify them, and waste a lot of time and energy in the process.

To put it another way, negative thoughts such as anger, resentment, greed, and worry are like holes in a tank, through which vitality drains. A few weeks ago, as we were driving to San Francisco, a car passed us, leaving a trail of gasoline. About half an hour later, we saw the same car parked on the shoulder of the road, out of gas.

I read a lot today about the crisis with fossil fuels. Many people still talk as if the only solution is to find some other source of power, but that is not enough; it is equally necessary to reduce consumption. The same is true when we are talking about our personal energy, our vitality. Here we have no atoms to split or fuse, no windmills to make, no sun to draw on for an alternative source of

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energy; we have to conserve what we have and make it last.

If we lived in a house with only one big battery's worth of electricity, we would be turning off lights right and left. If we had just one tank of fuel oil or gas, we would always be ready to turn down the heat. Similarly, when we are not using the mind, we can learn to turn it off. When some fierce desire is prompting us into action, we can learn to turn off the heat.

The power is not lost. Instead of being wasted, it is consolidated as tremendous reserves of vitality, security, and self-mastery.

Discrimination

This brings us to the fourth essential condition for love: the capacity to discriminate between right and wrong desires. The criteria are simple. Right desires benefit everyone – including, of course, ourselves. Wrong desires may be very pleasing, but they benefit no one – again, not even ourselves. The problem that arises is that wrong desires can be very skillful impersonators. They put on a three-piece suit and a false mustache and present themselves suavely as Mr. Right, the benefactor of all; if they happen to be just what we like, that is only a happy coincidence. To love, we need to be able to recognize right desires and yield to them, which is a pleasant but rare state of affairs. But much more importantly, we need to be able to recognize wrong desires and resist them, which is very, very difficult.

Most wrong desires, I admit, are not easily resisted. We have to draw on every militant instinct we have to take on the desire face-to-face. We don't even know we have this choice. When a big desire comes, we think we have to yield. There is some pleasure in yielding; but if I may say so, there is

much more lasting satisfaction in resisting, even if at first we do not win. The very attitude of resisting wrong desires is the beginning of good health, vitality, and love.

Not only that, resisting wrong desires actually generates energy. Whenever we can defy a strong selfish desire, immense power is released into our hands. I do not think this is even suspected outside the major religions of the world, yet it is the secret of all

will buy anything with his name on it. Therefore, though he came from a very poor family, no amount of money can tempt him to do something that will mislead young people or injure their health. To love is to be responsible like this in everything: the work we do, the things we buy, the food we eat, the people we look up to, the movies we see, the words we use, every choice we make from morning till night. That is the real measure of love. It is a wonderfully demanding responsibility.

*Whenever we resist a selfish desire,
even if we do so for no one in particular,
that is an act of love.*

Awareness of unity

Discrimination, then, leads us naturally to the last essential condition for love: the awareness that life is one indivisible

spiritual work and transformation.

Our desires are not our business alone; they are everybody's business. Whenever we resist a selfish desire, even if we do so for no one in particular, that is an act of love – just as every time we yield to a selfish desire, it shows want of love. The reason is simple: everything we do affects others, whether directly, through the environment, or by the force of our example. To me, for instance, smoking shows lack of love. First, the capacity for love is actually caught in that compulsion. But more than that, the smoke is harmful for everyone, and the example tells even casual passers-by, "Don't worry about the surgeon general. Don't worry about consequences; don't even think about the future. If it feels good, do it!"

Pelé, the great Brazilian soccer player, has long been in a position to command a king's ransom for endorsing commercial products. He has never given his endorsement to any brand of cigarettes, and I was very pleased to hear him give the reason in simple English: "I love kids." That is a perfect choice of words. He does love kids. He knows that in most of the world they

whole. This is the very basis of love. Any violation of the unity of life, whether it is between individuals, between nations, between us and the environment, or between us and our fellow creatures, is a failure of love. Everything that separates diminishes love; everything that unifies increases it. Lack of love divides; wealth of love heals.

To take just one aspect of this, you may recall Mother Teresa's brilliant truism: "It is always people you meet everywhere." Beneath the thinnest shell of differences, every one of us is very much the same, whether we live in Asia, Africa, Antarctica, or America.

Learning to love is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity – especially, perhaps, today, when the whole world, threatened with violence on every side, is starving for love and unity. "In the home," Mother Teresa says, "begins the disruption of the peace of the world." Similarly, it is in the home that the peace of the world is preserved. In nourishing our family, our community, and finally our world with love, turning our backs on ourselves when necessary to give what the world so desperately needs, we become, in the words of St. Francis, instruments of peace. ☺

Finding the Gift

KATHY R.'S passion for travel began even before she first boarded a plane as a young "airline hostess." ("This was the 1950s," she says.) Over the next five decades, her fascination with the world's places and cultures would take her from the Alaskan tundra to the windblown steppes of Patagonia and many places in between.

Along with her husband, George, she was often struck not only by the endless diversity but by the sameness underlying it. "All over the world, at eight o'clock in the morning I'd see the same thing: kids going to school and parents going to work – whether I was in Mexico City or a village in South Africa."

But several years ago, Kathy retired from the travel business and quietly set her passport aside. She had embarked on a different kind of journey, one that began the day George was diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

"At first, I just kept thinking, 'This can't be happening to us.' George was so innovative, so involved; it would amaze me how many people he knew by name, from maintenance staff to the hundreds of members of his travel agency consortium."

Over the next eight years, the mysterious and unpredictable disease would bring trial after trial, test after test. But Kathy learned to use her spiritual disciplines to travel inside herself to find the resources to face these challenges with grace and courage.

"The travel inward, that's the authentic travel," she says. "And this

journey has been the most difficult, the most demanding one I have ever taken. But it has also been the most rewarding, the most transformative.

"You can't deny the pain of it," she says. "But I see the whole experience as the most precious gift I could have been given" – a gift that still continues today, a year and a half after George's passing. "That never could have happened without meditation."



When Kathy's husband was struck with a serious illness, she was determined not to let the disease take away their relationship, or to take the joy out of living.

Here she shares the story of the greatest challenge she has faced, and how her spiritual disciplines helped her emerge from it with a deeper relationship with her husband and with her own deepest self.

"You've got to overcome separateness and strive for connectedness," she says. "The eight points give us a way to stay connected. [See page two.] Every one of these tools, if you're working on it every day, it really carries you through."

moment, and he'd disappear into a crowd. Soon she realized that she couldn't leave him at home alone, but taking him on errands posed its own challenges.

"You have to be on alert all the time," she says. "You start sleeping with one ear open."

And all the while, "There's a part of you that keeps thinking, 'I'd give anything to have our old life back – just for five minutes.'"

Kathy found some professional caregivers to assist in caring for George, and a few times concerned friends persuaded her to spend a weekend with them, which helped, but she went with mixed feelings. "You're desperate for rest and relief, and then you feel guilty when you get it."

The mother of five and a naturally vivacious person, Kathy had spent much of her life cheerfully tending to the needs of others. But one night, during a particularly stressful episode, "I just lost it," she says. "I was taking care of George, and suddenly I looked up and saw myself in the mirror." A mask of anxiety, frustration, grief, and exhaustion stared back at her. "I didn't recognize myself.

"I started crying. That confused George, and he tried to comfort me, but I couldn't tell him how I felt. I thought I'd always be able to keep a smile on my face when I was with him, so he would never feel like a burden on me. I felt absolutely

defeated."

It seemed like such a private, personal moment, but since then Kathy has seen how widespread this kind of burnout is. "Caregivers develop health problems they don't have time to deal with, all kinds of family issues and resentments come up –

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PART I

A pivotal moment

Not long after George's diagnosis, Kathy found herself in a new role as a full-time caregiver. At the beginning, he seemed fine most of the time, but then she would turn her back for a

Continued from previous page people suffer so much; I can't tell you."

In Kathy's case, however, she broke through to an entirely different way of facing the situation.

"At one point, I suddenly realized, 'For years, I've been trying to be the most caring, loving, forgiving person I can be – and I don't have to go anywhere to look for ways to work on that. It's all here in front of me.'" The aspirations that had led her to meditation, the ideals that sparked the volunteer work she left when George fell ill, her search for tough, worthwhile challenges to draw out the best in her – everything she needed to pursue these deep desires was right there.

"I resolved not to be a victim, but to accept this challenge as a gift. And that changed everything."

Conserving fuel

With this resolution, Kathy took a fresh look at the situation. What steps could she take to truly make it a gift for herself and George?

She knew that she needed to make sure she got enough sleep, exercise, time with friends. But even when she had these things, they didn't restore her.

Ultimately, she realized, it wasn't about her body, or her relationships. It was about her mind.

The tension between what she wanted to happen and what was actually happening, or between how she thought she should feel and how she actually felt, created a constant negative drone in the background – self-doubt, guilt, frustration, worry. That kind of thinking was wasting a tremendous amount of energy – energy she could use to gain more patience, resilience, and confidence. And she already knew how.

"The seeds were all being nurtured through the eight-point program," she says. Though she had kept up her daily meditation, seeing this link between her mental state and her energy levels

brought fresh motivation to deepen her practice of all the tools in the program.

One of the most helpful of these was the mantram. "For years I had used the mantram in moments of fear and seen how powerful it is. Now I started using it in all the day-to-day frustrations." A person who had spent decades orchestrating detailed logistics for elaborate group tours, Kathy now faced confounding problems in the most trivial situations.

"For example, I bought George new slippers. I'm used to little kids – you put them in your lap and get their foot into the shoe. Well, have you ever tried to get a slipper onto a man's foot when he can't help?

"That's where the mantram comes in." With a mind calmed by the mantram, "I can see the humor in the absurdity of certain situations," she says. "Because you can't afford to be morbid at a time like this in your life. You have to keep a sense of humor; you have to laugh a lot. This is very important.

"I don't know what the real power of the mantram is. I only know it works. But do you know what I think part of it is? It reminds you of your spiritual life. It says, 'Now, wait a minute. You're not just flailing around out here in the material world. You have a spiritual depth and a base – and you have tools.' It gets so that you say the mantram all the time – when you're going to sleep, when you wake up, for a lot of the time in between.

"And the repetition of it is very soothing. The minute you start saying the mantram, it brings your focus right back."

She also found a new mirror. "I love the passage 'The Shining Essence.'" [See box on next page.] In this meditation passage, the Lord surveys his creation: "I look into the mirror and see my own beauty; I see the truth of the universe revealing itself as me."

Every morning, Kathy started the day by absorbing passages such as this

one that reflected her deepest self back to her – that unchanging spark of divinity. And during the rest of the day, she'd try to hold that mirror up to George. "That half hour of meditation is so powerful. It really sets the tone for the day."

Keeping this focus, she says, "helped me to remember that there's so much goodness in the world, to remember to be joyful about this fabulous planet that we live on and the people that we're surrounded by.

"And George made that easier, because he never complained. He knew what was happening to him, and he would get confused and express his confusion, but every day he would tell me he loved me and say, 'Kathy, thank you so much for taking care of me.'"

Shedding baggage

Another way for Kathy to keep her energy strong and positive was to travel light. Freeing herself from unwanted habits, unnecessary opinions, and other mental clutter was something she'd worked on for years. But for the first time, she began to see a direct connection to her ability to be flexible and cheerful.

"Whether it's clothes you'll never wear or a craving for a particular food, it feels good to be free of things." Some of these were obvious, but she found herself working on deeper and subtler attachments. "It's not just objects, but desires too – an attachment to always being right, to 'knowing' what is going to happen next. They're a waste of energy.

"And the eight points give you a way of working on that. All of a sudden a light goes on, and you say, 'There's a little attachment there.' Because if you're not aware of it, how are you going to work on it?"

Lightening her load in this way helped her navigate her days more calmly. She found greater clarity and focus, which made it easier for her to restore herself.

For example, as she needed further help at home, she found additional caregivers who were skilled and kind. “And then, when they came at 10:30 in the morning, I walked right out the door,” she says. “I didn’t hang around to make sure they did it ‘right.’ Maybe they didn’t do things exactly the way I would do them, but they were very capable, very dependable, very compassionate.”

Because she was able to turn over her responsibilities not just physically but mentally, she says, “That time that I had to myself was so healing.” After some exercise, creative writing, and journaling, she was ready to face the next challenge. “Those four hours got me through the other twenty.

“Then one day, one of these caregivers, who has worked with many

Alzheimer’s patients, turned to me and said, ‘You do not realize how difficult it is going out on a case where the family is in denial, angry, depressed. And I’m convinced that if a person has Alzheimer’s and is surrounded by people who can’t accept that, the negativity gets transmitted to that person, and you spend your whole time trying to undo the effects.’ I hadn’t thought of that.

“She told me, ‘It’s wonderful to come here because George is so surrounded by love.’ And not just from me, but from all of his caregivers.”

PART II

Uncharted territory

George’s physical and mental condition continued to decline. “One night,

I woke up at midnight to check on him. When I didn’t find him in bed, I panicked. Running to the top of the stairs, I found him on the floor in the dark.” Though he wasn’t seriously injured, she was unable to lift him and had to call 911 for help. When it happened a second time weeks later, Kathy had to accept that she could no longer care for him safely at home.

Looking back, she sees this as one of the most difficult moments of her life. “I thought, ‘Will George think I don’t love him any more? Will he think I am abandoning him?’” At the same time, she was struggling to accept all the changes in her life and marriage brought about by his ailing health.

She was poised at the beginning of a new phase in her journey, she realized. In a sense, all the

*Continued
on page 12*

The Shining Essence

FAKHRUDDIN ARAQI

I look into the mirror and see my own beauty;
I see the truth of the universe revealing itself
as me.

I rise in the sky as the morning Sun,
do not be surprised,
Every particle of creation is me alone.

What are the holy spirits? my essence revealed.
And the human body? the vessel of
my own form.

What is the ocean that encircles the world?
A drop of my abundant Grace;
And the purest light that fills every soul?
A spark of my own illumination.

I am Light itself, reflected in the
heart of everyone;

I am the treasure of the Divine Name,
the shining Essence of all things.

I am every light that shines,
Every ray that illumines the world.

From the highest heavens to the bedrock
of the earth

All is but a shadow of my splendor.

If I dropped the veil covering my true essence
The world would be gone – lost in
a brilliant light.

What is the water that gives eternal life?
A drop of my divine nectar.
And the breath that brings the dead
back to life?

A puff of my breath, the breath of all life.

Memorizing Need Not Be Hard to Do

Tips and strategies from passage meditation retreats at the Blue Mountain Center

At a retreat here someone said while leafing through *Timeless Wisdom*, “I love looking at these meditation passages. They are so lofty. And what a wonderful idea, to focus on these in meditation. But, you know, I can’t face *memorizing* them. I am just not up to it!”

Do you feel that way too? If so, you are not alone.

But think of it: most of us remember the words to quite a few songs. Can you recall exerting much effort to memorize song lyrics? Usually we simply hear the song a few times, and in that way become familiar with it. If the tune catches our attention, we may sing along some, or even just hum. Then we find that we simply know the words. And we tend to know the words to that song for the rest of our lives.

Wouldn’t it be great if memorizing passages could be so easy? Good news: it can.

Try familiarizing yourself with the passage

A friend writes, “I decided to try to familiarize myself with a passage this winter. I chose ‘The Way of Love.’ I decided I would not really try to memorize it, but instead, just become familiar with it. My method was to read it through all the way every night before bed.

“I had a copy of the passage from a regional retreat, which I slipped into a clear sleeve to protect it, and put it on the nightstand next to the bed.

“After a month or so of reading it through once every night, I realized I pretty much knew the first stanza. And I hadn’t even tried to memorize it. Also, certain phrases from this passage began to attract my attention, such as ‘alike in heat and cold, pleasure and pain,’ ‘not agitating the world or by it agitated,’ and ‘the fragment’s cycle of birth and death.’ This attraction seems like a milestone along the way of learning a new passage.

“At some point I had to admit that I knew the first two stanzas. So, my approach changed. I would read the whole passage through each night, then I would read the first two stanzas through slowly. Last, I would close my eyes and say the first two stanzas in my head. Pretty soon, I decided I knew part of the third stanza. So, I thought, why not spend a few minutes on actually learning it? You can see where this is going.

“I continued in this vein, never pressuring myself to memorize the passage. I didn’t worry about whether I knew a new line or not. And there was no sense of deadline: I might start reading the same new stanza every night for a week, or even two weeks, depending on how my life was going. At some natural point I would then feel I might as well learn the next line or phrase that I didn’t yet know. Eventually, using this very natural method, I knew the whole passage.”

Familiarizing ourselves with a passage in this way makes use of visual cues. If we read the words out loud, or recite a line in the course of becoming familiar with the passage, that reinforces auditory cues. If we were to write out a line or two, that would bring kinetic cues into play.

Research shows that people respond best to one or another of these sorts of cues, namely visual (seeing), auditory (hearing), and kinesthetic (movement-based).

⇒ For a *visual* approach, look for patterns. As an example, take the passage entitled “United in Heart,” from the Rig Veda (page 102 of *God Makes the Rivers to Flow*):

May we be united in **heart**.
May we be united in **speech**.
May we be united in **mind**.
May we perform our duties
As did the wise of old.

May we be united in our **prayer**.
May we be united in our **goal**.
May we be united in our **resolve**.
May we be united in our **understanding**.
May we be united in our **offering**.
May we be united in our **feelings**.
May we be united in our **hearts**.
May we be united in our **thoughts**.
May there be perfect unity amongst us.

For the first verse of this passage, all one really has to learn is the main phrase, three other words, and an ending sentence.

The second verse is almost identical to the first, except for “our,” eight other words, and the ending line. It’s very easy to learn this passage.

⇒ If you’d like to make use of *kinesthetics*, try writing the passage, line by line or stanza by stanza. Start by looking at the first line. Then write it out from memory. Check it. If what you wrote was not accurate, write the corrected version. Once you know the first line, try the same process with the whole first stanza.

⇒ For an *auditory* method, try listening to Easwaran reciting any passage in the collection of MP3s at our Web site (www.easwaran.org).

⇒ For a method which combines *auditory and kinesthetic* features, try declaiming the passage, like an actor trying out new lines. It can help to walk or pace around while reciting the lines. Gestures can help. But note: it is best to select some private venue for this method!

When you are memorizing a line or a stanza, checking helps. This is called “feedback.” We learn by means of feedback.

It also helps to focus on small chunks – one or two lines, for example, rather than a whole stanza.

Returning to the passage later helps us retain it. This is how we can transfer a line or stanza from short-term memory into the long-term.

Situational factors matter too. For instance, it is much easier to memorize when we are calm. Remind yourself to slow down and be one-pointed before you begin. And teamwork helps. Try getting together with someone else who wants to memorize the same passage. Alternate listening to each other read it aloud.

Continue building your memory power

Simple methods like these gradually build up our memory power. And anyone who tries will become better at memorizing over time. Scientific evidence shows that frequent memorizing grows new brain pathways, and protects us from memory loss as we age. The truth is, anyone who decides to try it can build up their memory, at any age. ⇒

Continued from page 9 challenges she had faced up to this point were a preparation for the next stage – traveling deep within. And if she could go deep enough, she could find a place that even Alzheimer’s couldn’t reach. And maybe she could help George from that place.

At this point, meditation took on new meaning. “I realized, ‘I can’t do much for him materially any more, but I can still surround him with loving energy. I can still try to stay connected.’ And that’s the point of meditation: to go within to break down the barriers we have put between ourselves and the Creator, between ourselves and others.”

To help guide her toward that unknown place, she chose special travel companions. “I love the passages from the Sufi mystics because they are so profound. One of my favorites is ‘The Temple of the Lord’ from Kabir, especially this stanza: ‘O man, the object of supremest value for which you search throughout the world is here within you. But the veil of Illusion ever separates you from Him. Tear the veil boldly asunder and you will find Him.’

“Those veils,” she says, “are all the things we’re attached to – the things that stand between us and that experience of connection.”

In the course of George’s illness, she had already had to let go of many of those attachments – to him as her closest confidant, an engaging conversationalist, a provider and protector, a source of impressive creative energy.

And now she was facing the removal of still more veils – George as the man she took care of, the man with whom she shared years of special memories, the man who knew her name.

It seemed impossible – too hard, too steep a journey. But she was comforted and strengthened by the knowledge and faith that it was also a deeply meaningful journey. She tried to remember that those veils were just

the covering of something bright and unchanging.

For several months, everything was up and down. “My moods seemed to come out of nowhere. One minute I felt upbeat and confident; in the next, I was in the depths of despair. Some days, I was filled with gratitude for the wonderful facility George was in, for his wonderful new caregivers. And he and I still had moments of laughter together. On other days, I’d be wracking my brain for a way to reach him – a book on a favorite topic, a familiar drive through the vineyards.” And when those didn’t seem to work, she’d feel the waves of anger, frustration, and anxiety. “I missed him terribly. I’d think, ‘He’s disappearing right in front of my eyes.’”

But every morning, the passages were there, and she found the strength to take the next step. “I tried to remember that George’s very essence was mirrored in the universe, that he would always be with me.” Even in the midst of the turmoil of trying to remove the veils with one hand and holding on to them with the other, “I could feel healing taking place,” she says. “I felt closer not only to George but to all the other patients.”

It also helped greatly to focus on the effort, not the results. “Because we’re so goal-oriented, we think, ‘If I learn this skill, I’m going to achieve this’ – anticipating what the reward will be. Well, it doesn’t work like that with meditation. It’s a lifelong process. Reaching the point of enlightenment that the mystics reached, that’s a very difficult goal for us to achieve, but you don’t give up on it for that reason.”

And in relationships, the same holds true, she says. “You have to get out of that mindset of payoffs. In other words, if I love you, there’s no scorecard. I don’t expect anything in return. And I think that’s one of the messages here: in living the spiritual life, you’re not looking for a payoff. The payoff is in living the life. From the first day you

start meditating, you are receiving.”

On the morning of the day when George would pass away, Kathy went to see him. “The week before, he didn’t have a clue who I was, but on that day, I could tell by his eyes that his mind was clear. He couldn’t talk, but he knew exactly what I was saying.

“During those precious hours, I talked to him about all the trips we had taken, about the funny things that we experienced. I thanked him for everything he brought to my life.

“Then I was able to comfort him and say the mantram for him, and remind him of the loving energy that surrounded him. I held his hand and assured him that it was all right to leave, that I would be fine. Then I traveled with him as far as I could.”

That night she wrote in her diary, “I didn’t know that dying can be so beautiful.”

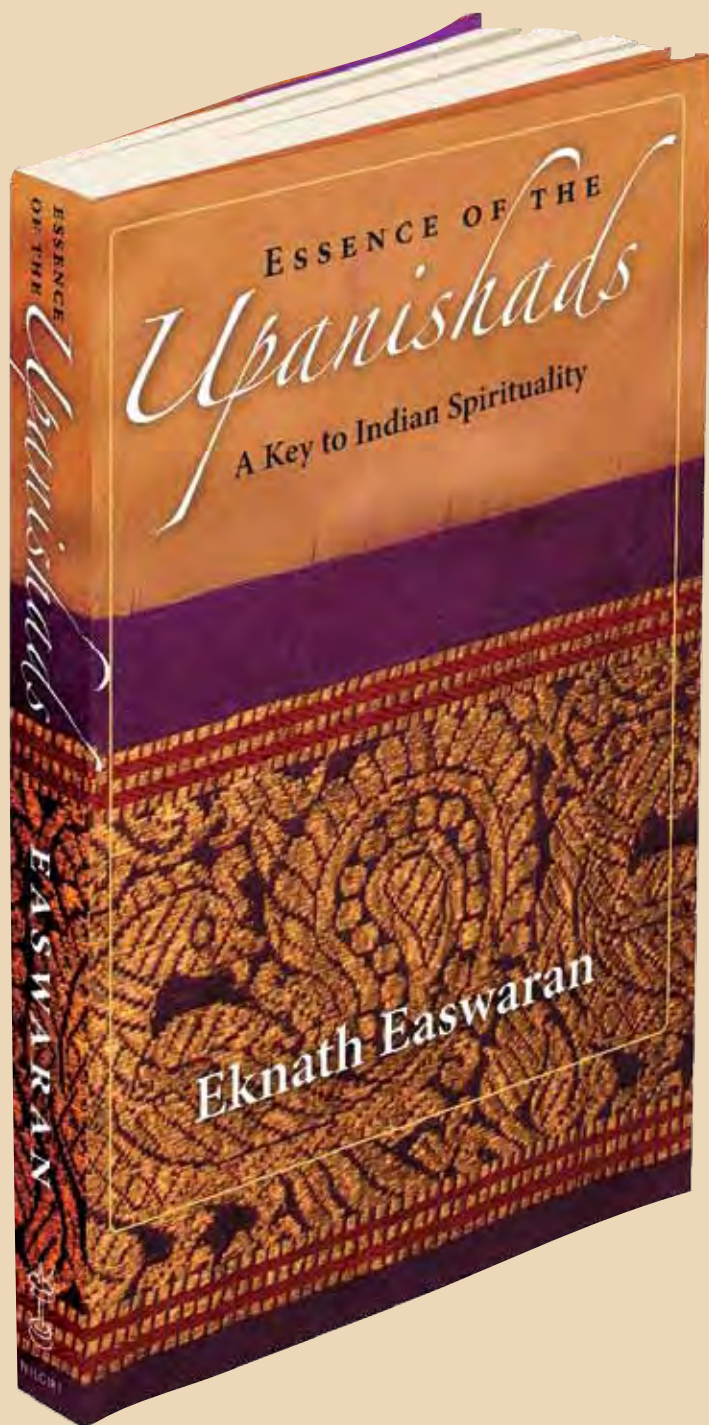
A new direction

As she faced a new life on her own, Kathy thought, “I feel like a woman on a raft in the middle of the ocean. My life is completely different, and I have to find a new direction, but I don’t know what I’m supposed to be doing.” Then one day, through meditation, an answer came: “Be fully present in each encounter with each person each day, and the big things will take care of themselves.” It was really the old answer carried into her new life: being “the most caring, loving, forgiving person” she could be.

“And that’s what I’m doing,” she says. “I still don’t know where I’m going.” But she knows how she’s going to get there, and that has made all the difference. “At first, I thought, ‘How can I feel so much joy and at the same time be experiencing the pain of losing George?’” But then she realizes how far she has traveled.

“As I’m looking back on this whole experience, I see what a gift it has been,” she says, “and I will never be the same.” ☞

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