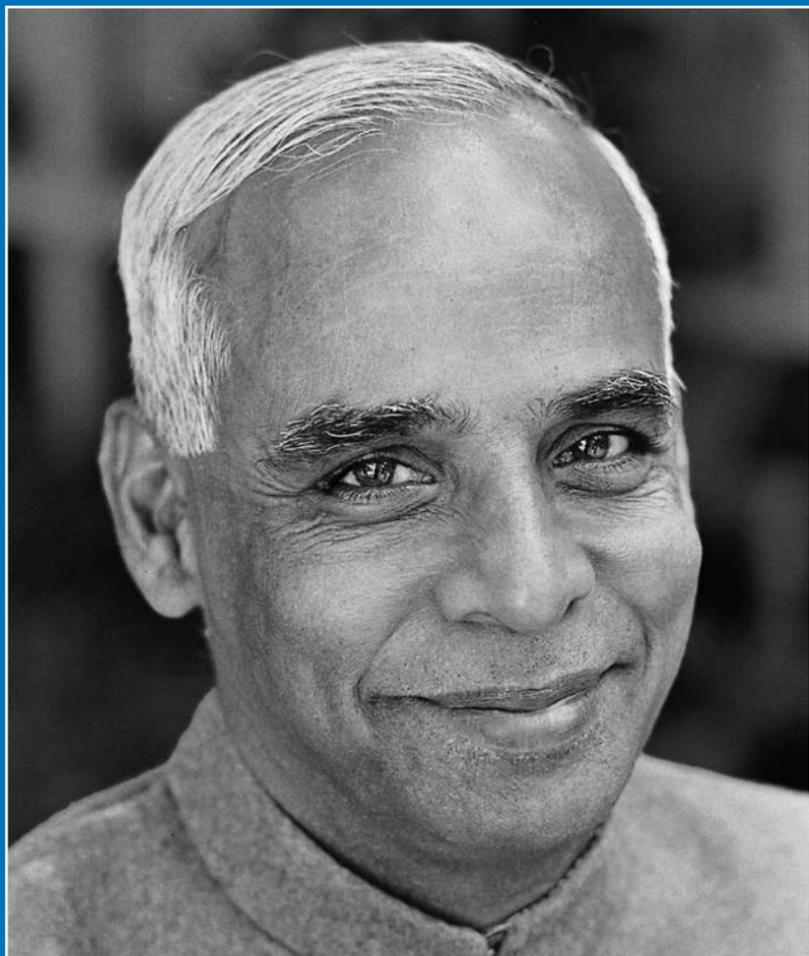


Ekknath Easwaran's

Blue Mountain Journal

Meditation and Spiritual Living



Winter 2015

The Challenge of Choosing to Be Kind

In This Issue

By Christine Easwaran



Easwaran liked to quote a great mystic, Ruysbroeck, who was asked for the secret of leading a spiritual life. Ruysbroeck replied, “Be kind. Be kind. Be kind.” If this sounds simplistic, try it. You will find that the effort to choose a kind response in the face of provocation reaches into the deepest recesses of consciousness.

In this double holiday issue, dedicated to the sixth point in Easwaran’s eight-point program, Putting Others First, Easwaran addresses questions on kindness that often come up on our retreats: how to respond to difficult people; how to stay patient in the face of life’s inevitable irritations; how to transform anger; and how to avoid being a doormat. You’ll also find spiritual passages with a focus on kindness that Easwaran recommended for meditation, together with his own summary of his eight-point program for spiritual living.

As part of our holiday celebration, we’ve included a special photo essay on page 40 titled “Seeking the Same Self in All,” with photos of recent retreatants, ashram residents, and BMCM visitors of all ages—representing our growing BMCM community.

If you’d like to join our latest journal discussion group, please email us at BeKind@easwaran.org.

Wishing you a happy, peaceful holiday season.

For the Board of Trustees

The Same Self Is in All of Us

The same spark of divinity—this same Self—is enshrined in every creature. My real Self is not different from yours nor anyone else’s. If we want to live in the joy that increases with time, if we want to live in true freedom independent of circumstances, then we must strive to realize that even if there are four people in our family or forty at our place of work, there is only one Self.

This realization enables us to learn to conduct ourselves with respect to everyone around us, even if they provoke us or dislike us or say unkind things about us. And that increasing respect will make us more and more secure. It will enable us gradually to win everybody’s respect, even those who disagree with us or seem disagreeable.

Most of us can treat others with respect under certain circumstances—at the right time, with the right people, in a certain place. When those circumstances are absent, we usually move away. Yet when we respond according to how the other person behaves, changing whenever she changes, and she is behaving in this same way, how can we expect anything but insecurity on both sides? There is nothing solid to build on.

Instead, we can learn to respond always to the Self within—focusing not on the other person’s ups and downs, likes and dislikes, but always on what is changeless in each of us. Then others grow to trust us. They know they can count on us—and that makes us more secure too.

We can try to remember this always: the same Self that makes us worthy of respect and love is present equally in everyone around us. It is one of the surest ways I know of to make our latent divinity a reality in daily life.

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The Challenge of Choosing to Be Kind

Frequently Asked Questions
answered by Eknath Easwaran

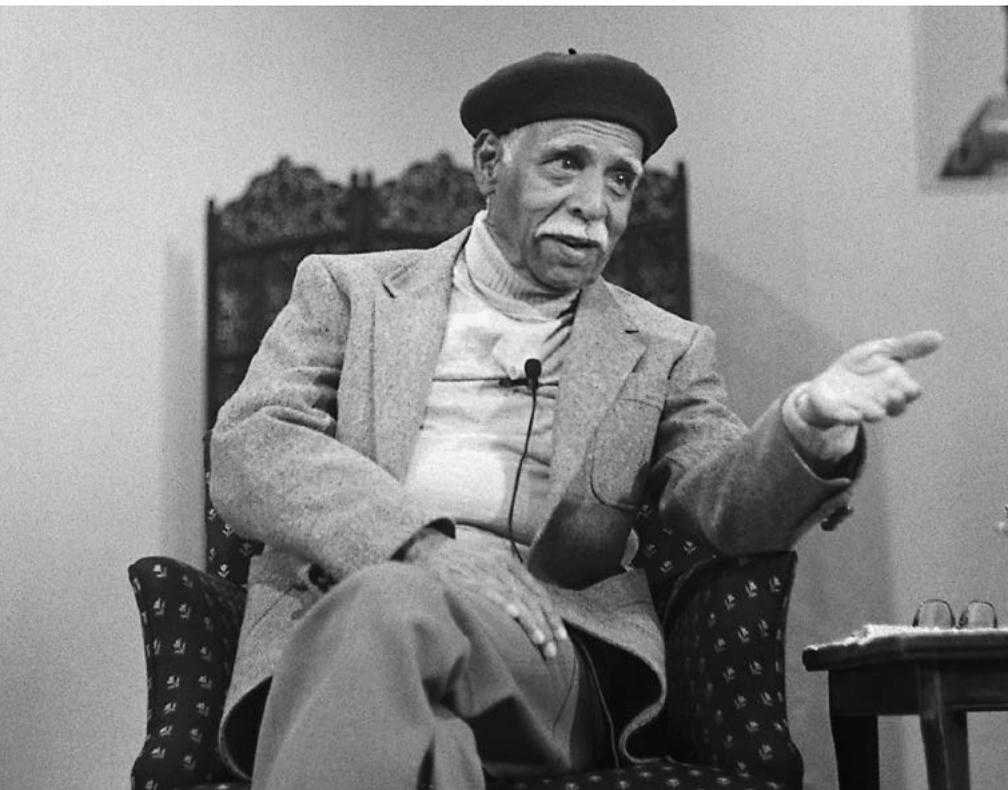
I know you say we should be kind, but I find it really hard not to lash out if someone attacks me. Anything else feels weak.

Strength is often equated with the capacity to attack, but to me it means the internal toughness to take whatever life deals out without losing your humanity. It is those who never stoop to retaliation, never demand an eye for an eye, who are truly strong. They have the toughness to be tender, even sweet, while resisting violence with all their heart.

By contrast, those who are ready to strike back at the slightest provocation are not strong but fragile. They may espouse a higher view of human nature, but almost anything can break them and make them lash back at those they oppose.

Indulging in anger is pointing a poison-tipped arrow inward, aimed straight at ourselves. It taints our thinking, poisons our feelings, turns our relationships adversarial. If we continue to think resentful thoughts, mistrust spreads in consciousness like some toxic underground chemical until we have a permanent disposition for suspicion.

When anger pollutes our internal environment to this extent, we don't need particular events to trigger suspicion. It has become an automatic response, draining us of energy like an insidious hidden leak. Our nervous system and vital organs react angrily on their own, without any connivance from the mind. The long-term effects can



Easwaran fielding questions,
Ramagiri Ashram, 1987.

be disastrous: heart disease, stroke, extreme emotional stress, perhaps even lower resistance to disease and impaired capacity to heal.

When someone is being sarcastic or cruel to you, the natural response is to retaliate. If you want to be unshakable, you have to train your mind in patience and endurance, the most grueling training that life offers. Life shows no mercy to those who lack this inner strength. Every virtue requires the toughness never to retreat in the face of challenge.

I have the opposite problem: I tend to back off even if someone is taking advantage of me.

Putting others first does not mean saying yes to everyone. When you allow people to exploit you, you aren't just hurting yourself; you are helping the exploiter to hurt himself as well. To connive at somebody who is not living up to his responsibilities not only doesn't help the situation; it doesn't help that person either.

Seeing the Self in those around us means supporting them to do better—not through words, but through unvarying respect and personal example. It is this unwavering focus on the Self in others that helps them realize its presence in themselves—and in us and others as well.

The more insensitive the other person is, the more reason for you to alert your mind to be calm and compassionate—and, if necessary, to face opposition firmly but tenderly. We aren't helping inconsiderate people when we give in to their demands or let them walk all over us. It only feeds the habit of rudeness to let them have their way.

It requires enormous judgment, and bravery too, to oppose nonviolently people we love. We can

lovingly wear them down with our patience, and when we see signs of regret and reconciliation, we make friends again and completely forget the barrier that stood between us.

Love often shows itself in the inward toughness that is required to say no to an attitude or desire that we think will bring harm. Parents have to do this often, for children who grow up without hearing no from their parents will be terribly brittle when they have to take no from life itself—and, worse, they will have a hard time saying no to themselves.

But loving opposition, whether to children or to adults you live or work with, has to be done tenderly and without any anger or condescension. Otherwise you are likely only to be adding more self-will to the flames. This is a difficult art. Go slowly, and remember that it is always better not to act in the heat of the moment. Whenever time allows, instead of responding immediately to an unwise demand, take a mantram walk first, meditate, and then speak when you can do so with kindness and patience. Remember, too, that the very best way to change someone is to begin with your own example.

I don't know that I'm capable of this.

Friends often tell me, "But I can't be like that! I have very negative thoughts. A person like you wouldn't understand." I assure them that indeed I do understand. Yet all the major religions have given us clear instructions in how to transform our personality from self-centered to selfless, from unconcerned to caring, eventually even from human to divine.

Intellectual study cannot be of much help in

Loving opposition has to be done tenderly.

Putting others first does not mean saying yes to everyone.

Only meditation can take us deep into consciousness.

this transformation. Only meditation, the systematic turning inward of attention, can take us deep into consciousness where the obstacles to a pure heart hide. Meditation can be described as nothing more or less than the purification of consciousness, by removing everything that obstructs our vision of the divine core in others and in ourselves.

In meditation, when you go through an inspirational passage with complete attention, each significant word or phrase drops like a jewel into the depths of consciousness. With each sentence you are absorbing the loftiest image of human nature. When your absorption in the passage is complete, nothing else will remain in your consciousness. Little by little, divinity begins to shine through.

This may sound simple, but it is far from easy. The miracle is that it can be done at all. In spite of how the horizons of knowledge keep expanding, the one thing almost no one even suspects today is that it is actually possible, with a good deal of effort, to penetrate the depths of the unconscious mind and bring about the kind of unifying changes which will make a new person of us. This is the best-kept secret of the ages: that any one of us

The one thing that has helped me get a grip on my anger is daily meditation. I've used the same passage over and over: the Buddha's "Give Up Anger." Those last five lines really tell you how to do it, and I like the practical tips for being kind.

A journal reader

Give up Anger

Give up anger, give up pride, and free yourself from worldly bondage. No sorrow can befall those who never try to possess people and things as their own. Those who hold back rising anger like a rolling chariot are real charioteers. Others merely hold the reins.

Conquer anger through gentleness, unkindness through kindness, greed through generosity, and falsehood by truth. Be truthful; do not yield to anger. Give freely, even if you have but little. The gods will bless you.

Injuring no one, self-controlled, the wise enter the state of peace beyond all sorrow. Those who are vigilant, who train their minds day and night and strive continually for nirvana, enter the state of peace beyond all selfish passions.

There is an old saying: "People will blame you if you say too much; they will blame you if you say too little; they will blame you if you say just enough." No one in this world escapes blame.

There never was and never will be anyone who receives all praise or all blame. But who can blame those who are pure, wise, good, and meditative? They shine like a coin of pure gold. Even the gods praise them, even Brahma the Creator.

Use your body for doing good, not for harm. Train it to follow the dharma. Use your tongue for doing good, not for harm. Train it to speak kindly. Use your mind for doing good, not for harm. Train your mind in love. The wise are disciplined in body, speech, and mind. They are well controlled indeed.

From the Dhammapada of the Compassionate Buddha

can become the kind of person he or she dreams of becoming.

In addition to meditation, there is another powerful tool for purifying consciousness that can be used at almost any time during the day. Meditation is a demanding discipline, but even children can learn to use what in Sanskrit is called the mantram.

The mantram is a short, potent spiritual formula for the highest that we can conceive. Every major religion has a mantram, often more than one. If you have no affiliation with a religion, however, you can still use a mantram and benefit from it. I have heard countless times from confirmed skeptics and agnostics that the mantram came to their help just when they needed it, though they hadn't expected it to mean anything to them at all.

One of the oldest and most popular mantrams in India, *Rama*, is the one Mahatma Gandhi used. *Rama* (the word rhymes with *drama*) is a name of the Lord that comes from a word meaning "joy" or "to rejoice," so repeating *Rama, Rama, Rama* is calling on the source of joy in our hearts. When someone comes to me for a mantram and says that he or she doesn't believe in God or belong to any particular religion, this is the mantram I most often give them. It is short, rhythmic, easy to remember, and powerful.

You will find full instructions for using a mantram in my little book *The Mantram Handbook*, but briefly, the mantram can be repeated silently in your mind whenever your mind is running off at the mouth—which for all of us is likely to be much more often than we suspect. Instead of worrying, fussing, fretting, fuming, steaming, simmering, daydreaming, or woolgathering, repeat the mantram. Nothing will be lost, and you will find

Thanks to the mantram

My recent small success involved a shopping trip to Costco which ranks high on my list of least favorite things to do. The friend I was accompanying, however, loves to go there. It was about 3:00 pm, I had not eaten since early morning and I could feel my impatience rising. Thanks to the mantram, slowing down, putting others first and the wisdom of our teacher, I remembered Easwaran's comment about not acting like a petulant two year old when you are hungry or tired or doing something you don't want to do.

Using many of the tools available to us through this practice, space was created to allow the rising impatience, frustration and anger to be transformed into the desire for my friend to have an enjoyable experience shopping. A small victory against self will.

A member of our Affiliate Program

that every repetition helps to steady your mind and sharpen your appreciation of life around you.

Could you explain more about seeing the same Self in all?

Because all of us are one, most personal problems and weaknesses are really very similar. As the Upanishad says, they differ "only in name and form." Almost everyone is subject to insecurity, even those who appear most forceful; getting angry and throwing one's weight around are signs of insecurity, not strength. Most of us are subject to dwelling on ourselves, often with negative feelings that can be terribly oppressive. In such cases anyone can feel inadequate, unable to cope with the responsibilities of the day.

Similarly, all of us have times when we are

patient, days when we are kind, because beneath our passing, everyday personality, this transcendent Self is always present. It does people great harm to forget this and give them the impression that they are no good by focusing attention on their faults.

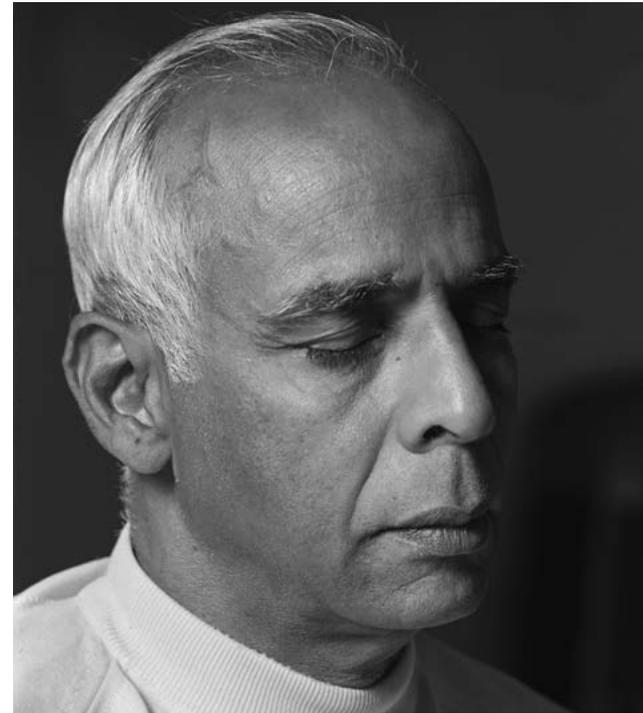
Spiritual living means learning to do just the opposite. Whatever a person's problems, we can learn to keep our attention always on the divinity within.

But what if they're really annoying?

Some people *are* a little more irritating and self-willed than others; there is no doubt about it. But instead of criticizing such people, which only makes their alienation worse, you can focus all your attention on what is best in them. The more you learn to change your likes and dislikes at will, the more clearly you will be able to see the core of purity and selflessness that is the real Self in everyone.

This is one of the most practical skills I have learned from my spiritual teacher, my grandmother, and it can be tremendously effective in helping those around you. It is something like turning a flashlight on a particular spot. I don't diffuse my attention to take in both positive and negative behavior; I keep concentrating on what is kind, what is generous, what is selfless, and the amazing response is that this kind of support draws out and strengthens these very qualities. Not only that, as they become more secure, such people begin to spread this consideration to their other relationships too.

In a sense, it comes down to attention. When we are preoccupied with ourselves—our thoughts,



Easwaran in meditation

This Morning I Pray

This morning, as I kindle the fire on my hearth, I pray that the flame of God's love may burn in my heart and in the hearts of all I meet today.

I pray that no envy or malice, no hatred or fear, may smother the flame. I pray that indifference and apathy, contempt and pride, may not pour like cold water on the fire.

Instead, may the spark of God's love light the love in my heart, that it may burn brightly through the day.

And may I warm those who are lonely, whose hearts are cold and lifeless, so that all may know the comfort of God's love.

From the Celtic Christian tradition

When we turn away from ourselves, we begin to see what is best for those we love.

our desires, our preferences—we cannot help becoming insensitive to others’ needs. We can pay attention only to so much, and all our attention rests on ourselves. When we turn away from ourselves, even if only a little, we begin to see what is really best for those we love.

I seem to be more irritable now with my partner than I used to be. What’s going wrong?

Most loving relationships do not grow unloving overnight, but all of us are capable of being unkind. If allowed to grow, little by little this seed of unkindness damages our feelings for each other. Today at breakfast you yield to a little irritation and use harsh language, but after you go to the office everything is fine, so you don’t pay any attention to the little incident at breakfast. “Oh,” you think, “I got up on the wrong side of the bed, but things are all right now.”

Then the next morning it happens again, but instead of getting concerned again you think, “It’s such a small thing. We were out of coffee, and I made a silly remark. No one would make an issue out of it.” You can easily justify your blunt words. After all, you were being factual. Any

Meditation is the foundation

All the eight points are important tools for transforming anger and fear into kindness and compassion, but it is daily meditation that is the foundation. It is in my morning meditation that I am enabled to move above my small self to glimpse the Self. Without that informing power, I am unequal to the tasks and lessons of the day.

An eSatsang member

reasonable person can see that. You didn’t mean to attack anyone; you were just making a statement about the coffee. No one should take it personally.

Then one morning you burn your toast. Someone has set the toaster on high, and the bread pops up smoking like a cinder. You lose your temper. But this time it is your partner who has got up on the wrong side of the bed, and she lets you have it in return. With barely controlled outrage, she informs you that you are the one who always sets the toaster on high, though she has reminded you several times that it will burn the toast.

Gradually, the conversation gets more and more heated. One thing leads to another until there is smoke rising in clouds over the breakfast table. The ashes are smoldering, fed by little irritations that are so small we may not even be aware of them. If we are aware, we disregard them as the minor frustrations of daily life. “Oh, it’s just the give and take of life. I can take a few pinpricks.”

But at the rate of ten pinpricks a day, by the end of the year you have absorbed 3,650 jabs and are beginning to feel like a pincushion. After a few years, your nervous system begins to show the effects. Formerly, if your partner said something that you didn’t like, you quietly offered a wry smile. When something tried your patience, you made a joke or even quoted a line from Shakespeare. Now you cannot control your tongue. You cannot help retaliating.

Your capacity for tolerance has come to an end, and when that happens not even the best among us, who take pride in having the finest manners, can refrain from saying and doing things we will later regret. It is not because we are bad, but

because the ashes have been smoldering for a long time and finally the flames burst out.

This is how estrangements start. At the same time, it is by remembering the many good things that happen every day that we strengthen our love and heal our lives. When there is a harsh word, we can remember how many kind words there have been in the past. When there is a thoughtless action, we can remember how much consideration there has been in the past. This restores our sense of proportion.

I've been meditating for some time, but I still find myself snapping at my partner or my kids.

It does grieve us to realize that even with our loved ones, we cannot always control our own temper. Sometimes it breaks loose and runs amok almost with a will of its own.

It is precisely at such a moment, when your temper is about to burst all bounds, that the Lord within can come to your rescue—and the rescue of those around you. Even if God is the furthest thing from your mind, go for a walk and start repeating the mantram for all you're worth—not aloud but in your mind—and keep bringing your attention back to it over and over again until your mind is calm. Then, when you go back to the scene that brought you distress, you will be able to stay relatively calm and compassionate. You can speak kindly, even when the other person's response is far from kind.

I know how difficult this can be. But when someone offends you, instead of thinking over and over again, "She hurt me! She hurt me!" you can actually use the mantram as an eraser. All the power behind your anger then goes into the

The secret of the mind is that it is a sponge: we slowly become what we soak our consciousness in.

A small miracle in the kitchen

My dear husband and I cook together on weekends. But during the week (we both work full time) I generally make a salad for dinner. My husband, who needs a very high calorie, high carb, high fat diet, makes his own dinner on weekdays. He's a great cook, and generally uses multiple pans, bowls, cutting boards, knives, spatulas, measuring cups, etc., for every meal he makes.

For 20+ years of marriage, we've had this running tension about kitchen cleanup. I like to wake up to a clean kitchen. My husband believes that the time to wash a pan is when you need to use it again. We've tried to resolve this many ways, but generally, it's been resolved by my cleaning up all of the assorted cooking implements, banging pans a little too loudly at times, sighing a little too often. Dragging my mind back to the mantram over and over.

Over the last year, a small miracle. Resentment has faded away, and I find myself joyfully cleaning up, happy to have a clean place for our food, happy to be keeping us healthy. The mantram is almost singing in my mind, rather than being dutifully repeated.

Amazingly, my husband has started to clean the kitchen with me a few nights a week! As a fellow meditator pointed out, hard to stay away from all that joy.

Didn't need to go to the Himalayas to find a little taste of love and freedom, just needed to spend 20 years in the kitchen with my husband repeating the mantram.

A member of our Affiliate Program

erasing, and resentment goes no deeper than writing on water.

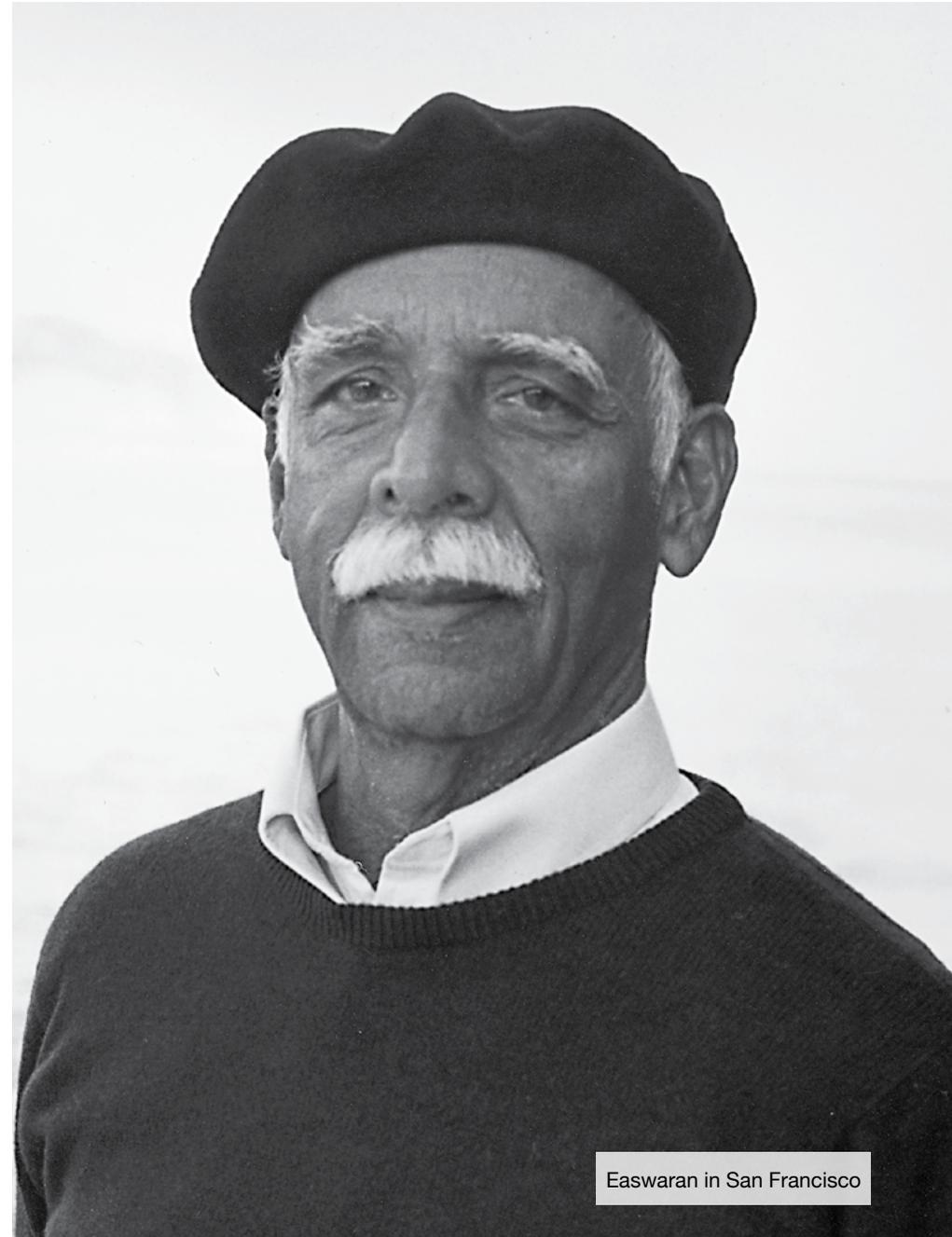
The secret of the mind is that it is a sponge: we slowly become what we soak our consciousness in. When your mind dwells on jealousy, you cannot help becoming more jealous. When it dwells on wrongs you have suffered, you are soaking yourself in anger. The only alternative is to teach the mind to soak itself in love, through the practice of meditation and repetition of the mantram.

Can you say more about what you mean when you say we can transform anger?

Anger is power. When I see instances of injustice—which I do every day now in the newspapers and magazines—I get enormously angry. For example, coming from India, I still identify with the plight of the third world. I grieve every time I am reminded that half a billion people, most of them children, go to bed hungry each night. I don't have to see them face to face to feel their suffering; they are right there in my consciousness. But as that anger rises, it is transformed into creative energy for selfless action. That is why you will never hear me waste a word on judging, haranguing, and complaining. My time and energy go into teaching others how to live by the unity of life, so that these wrongs can be set right.

What's at the root of negative tendencies like anger?

All these habits of mind that can make life hell, the mystics say, can be traced to one central flaw of attention. To call it self-preoccupation comes close: the habit of dwelling on my needs, my desires, my plans, my fears. The more deeply



Easwaran in San Francisco

Asking life to make a selfish person happy is like asking a banana tree to give you mangoes.

ingrained this pattern of thinking is, the mystics say, the more we make ourselves a little island isolated from the rest of life, with all the unhappiness that has to follow.

This is not a moral judgment; it is simply the way happiness works. Asking life to make a selfish person happy, my grandmother used to say, is like asking a banana tree to give you mangoes.

But there is a better word for this habit of mind: self-will, the insistent drive to have our own way, to get what we want, whatever it may cost. Self-will has a million forms, but every one of them is a kind of torment. Whenever we feel life is being unfair to us, whenever we hurt because people are not treating us right or paying us attention or giving us our due respect, nine times out of ten what is hurting is our self-will. An anonymous mystical document known as the *Theologica Germanica* says succinctly, “Nothing burns in hell except self-will.” No God has to punish us for being self-willed; self-will is its own punishment, its own hell.

I like to think of self-will as love turned around. Love is energy, and self-will is that energy focused on oneself. We can learn to free that energy, and when we do, our lives will fill with love—which is what living in heaven means.

In today’s competitive climate, often those who are aggressive about imposing their will on others are considered successful. But the accomplishments of such people are often sadly short-lived, while the damage they do themselves and others can be far-reaching. When self-will is excessive, we end up offending others, feeling offended, and lashing back, and that undoes everything worthwhile we might achieve.

People with little self-will, on the other hand, seldom get upset when life goes against them. They do not try to impose their way on others, or get agitated or depressed or defensive when people hold different views. Being intolerant of other views, Mahatma Gandhi used to say, is a sign that we don’t have enough faith in our own. To get agitated and angry when opposed shows a certain insecurity. If we really believe what we believe, we will not be shaken when someone challenges it.

You’ve said before that there’s a connection between being speeded up and finding it hard to be kind. Could you explain?

There is a close connection between speed and impatience. Impatience is simply being in a hurry. Our culture has become so speeded up today that no one has time to be patient. People in a hurry cannot be patient—so people in a hurry cannot really love. To love, we need to be sensitive to those around us, which is impossible if we are racing through life engrossed in all the things we need to do before sunset.

In fact, I would go to the extent of saying that a person who is always late will find it difficult to love; he will be in too much of a hurry. A late riser will find it difficult to love; she will always be going through the day trying to catch up.

As human beings, it is our nature to be part of a whole, to live in a context where personal relationships are supportive and close.

Yet although it is natural, this is one of the first things to be forgotten when we get speeded up. Because when the mind is going too fast, it is impossible to be sensitive to the needs of others.

When the mind is going too fast, it is impossible to be sensitive to the needs of others.

It is impossible to resist the insistent little voice inside that demands, “You have got to get your way!” So often, this is what damages loving relationships in our hectic world.

This sounds very different from what most people believe today.

Self-will has always been human nature, but today it is almost worshiped in some circles. Unselfishness is considered old-fashioned and unnatural, and to be happy, some professional psychologists say, we have to learn to assert ourselves, attend to our personal needs first, “look out for number one.”

To be sure, there are reasons for these extreme positions. People think that being unselfish is boring, that a selfless person cannot possibly

enjoy life because he is constantly making himself a doormat, that to have a high sense of worth you have to have a big ego. These are just misunderstandings, but the observation remains true: our age sets a premium on self-will in aggressiveness, competitiveness, and self-aggrandizement; that, we are told, is the route to joy. Yet to live as a separate creature, cut off from the rest of life, is just the opposite of joy.

The Persian mystic Jalaluddin Rumi summed up the spiritual quest in one quiet sentence: “Pilgrimage to the place of the wise is to find escape from the flame of separateness.” Ultimately, self-will becomes a solid wall that keeps others out and ourselves walled in.

Imagine trying to walk around the Great Wall of China, fourteen hundred miles of meandering masonry clinging to every hill and valley as far as the eye can see. That is what trying to get around self-will is like.

When we feel intense anguish in a personal relationship, more often than not what pains us is not differences of politics or taste; it is just self-will in another of its disguises, hurting because it cannot have its way.

I still find it very painful when someone attacks me personally.

Almost all of us suffer when we are criticized, or when friends suddenly turn on us or let us down. By using blows such as these as opportunities to keep our mind steady, we can erase negative responses like depression and resentment from our hearts completely. And when all resentment, all ill will, all depression is gone, we live in heaven here on earth.

The Way to Peace

If anyone speaks ill of you,
Praise him always.
If anyone injures you,
Serve him nicely.
If anyone persecutes you,
Help him in all possible ways.
You will attain immense strength.
You will control anger and pride.
You will enjoy peace, poise and serenity.
You will become divine.

Swami Sivananda

This passage sets a really high bar, and one that’s too high for me—but it has helped me stay more patient with a difficult colleague. I really like the rollout of the benefits in the last four lines.

A retreatant

“We need difficult people for our growth”

Years ago I was new to the writings of Easwaran and was traveling with one of his books while visiting my sister a great distance from my home. My sister is a very difficult person to get along with. In spite of my spending a day performing helpful projects on her home, she constantly criticized the way in which I performed each project. I kept my burning anger to myself but that evening I had decided that if she continued her abusiveness the next day, I was going to quit volunteering my time and tell her off.

Before going to sleep, I opened up Easwaran's book to the next unread chapter and the words began “We need difficult people for our growth”. The words leapt out at me with obvious intent and saved me from a future impasse with my sister that would have been difficult to amend in the future, being that I lived so far away.

Easwaran's words have continued to be my guiding light throughout the years. I can honestly say he “turned my head around”.

An Easwaran reader

Instead of looking at difficulties as deprivations, we can learn to recognize them as opportunities for deepening and widening our love. You don't run away from opportunities; you keep on the lookout for them. Lashing out at others, trying to “get even” when people are harsh, only wastes these precious chances for growth, which can come in no other way.

So how should we react when people criticize us? How did you manage?

For those of us who have had our intellects honed to be sarcastic, it's very difficult to keep from using sharp words. When you're being criticized or attacked, it's almost considered an intellectual responsibility to answer back with compound interest. And that's just what I used to do in faculty meetings, along with everyone else—until I began to understand that if somebody attacked me, there was no need to get angry. It didn't improve the situation on any level—and besides, something within me rebelled against being bounced around like a rubber ball. So I started repeating my mantram silently and keeping quiet.

Again, this doesn't mean making a doormat of yourself. Just the opposite. It is training—learning to get your mind under control. The first goal is to break the connection between stimulus and response. Later, once you have a measure of detachment, you can reply to criticism without identifying yourself with your opinions or the other person with hers, choosing words that are kind, respectful, and to the point. The key is to have a choice.

What about when a family member, for instance, does something bad to us and we really need to vent?

Here Mahatma Gandhi, who reminds me of St. Francis in so many ways, joins him to give us the same instruction: let your heart melt with compassion for others, but stand firm where your own difficulties are concerned.

This is one of the simplest ways of leading the spiritual life, and the practical application is very simple: when you want to dwell on your troubles, turn your attention away from yourself to the welfare of those in your own family. Think only about the needs of the whole and forget your own problems—they will be included when you pay attention to the needs of all, in which group you too are included.

And don't stop there. Your family can easily become only an extension of your own ego. Turn your attention outward until it is riveted on the needs not only of your own family but also on

The Whole World Is Your Own

I tell you one thing: If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather learn to see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; this whole world is your own.

Sri Sarada Devi

I avoided using this passage for a long time in my meditation. I do have a tendency to be judgmental, and the passage simply didn't appeal. But I also aspire to being kinder, so I learned it a few weeks ago.

An eSatsang member

the needs of those you work with and those in the community in which you live. Eventually your concern should embrace the needs even of those in other countries. You will find the sense of separateness, which is the source of all suffering, slowly being reduced—day by day, month by month, year by year.

When you feel you are in such a difficult situation that you need to go begging for attention, instead of seeking sympathy or a willing ear, go for a fast walk repeating your mantram: *Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, or Ave Maria, or Barukh attah Adonai, or Om mani padme hum, or Mahatma Gandhi's mantram, Rama, Rama, Rama.* You are calling on the source from which all attention comes, asking for help from that inner source which alone can strengthen you and guide you wisely—the divine spark buried deep in your own consciousness.

I get a bit confused about being kind—I know I'm a people-pleaser.

Putting others first is an area in which the mind can often play tricks on us. Interestingly enough, often when we think we are thinking of others, putting their needs first, we are really just trying to please—which means we are really thinking about ourselves. You can see how slippery self-will can be.

I find myself quickly becoming judgmental. Have you any advice?

When we keep pointing a finger of judgment at others, we are teaching our mind a lasting habit of condemnation. Sooner or later, that finger of judgment will be aimed point-blank at ourselves. It is not that people do not sometimes warrant

judgment; fault is very easy to find. But judgmental attitudes and a suspicious eye only poison a situation. To right wrongs and help others correct their faults, we have to focus on what is positive and never give in to negative thinking.

Love, sympathy, and forbearance require steady strength of mind. Love means that whenever negative thoughts enter the mind, we can turn our attention to positive thoughts instead. This is all that is required to guard ourselves against lapses from love.

Keeping “family” in perspective

The major situation where my cheerfulness evaporates is in difficult family settings involving our grandchildren. I have worked very hard at redefining the situations as opportunities for cheerfulness with the practice of much mantram writing and walks, carefully choosing the passages I meditate on, much work with what healthy detachment means and how to live it, devoting my afternoon meditation session to forgiveness of self and others, trying to add to my level of patience with self and others daily, and remembering what my supreme goal is in this life and working toward it every day through the practice of the eight-point program.

It helps a great deal to keep “family” in perspective, and to use my energy in much gratitude for the life I do live.

An eSatsang member

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

This does not mean becoming blind to what others are doing. That is not what mercy and forgiveness mean. I know when somebody is being rude or unkind, but it does not impair my faith in that person or lower him in my eyes. I keep my eyes on the core of goodness I see in him, and act toward him as I would have him act toward me. There is only one way to make others more loving, and that is by loving more ourselves.

What we are looking for in others is generally what we find. “Such as we are inwardly,” Thomas à Kempis says, “so we judge outwardly.” Psychology can go no deeper. If we want to follow Jesus’ dictum to “judge not,” we must change who we are; then others will change in our own eyes. When we ourselves are trustworthy, for example, we see others the same and trust them accordingly—and when we do, interestingly enough, our trust is often rewarded. Trust is a two-way street. It is the same with our other judgments about life: it’s amazing how quickly the world we live in conforms itself to our ideas about it.

Could you give an example?

You can test this intriguing law in the laboratory of your own life. If someone at work absolutely seems to enjoy making things rougher for you, try treating that person with extra respect—and go on showing him respect no matter how he acts. In a

I know when somebody is being rude or unkind, but it does not impair my faith in that person.

surprisingly short time, I predict, his behavior will begin to verify your faith in his better side.

Yet I need hardly remind you how hard it is to start letting down old, ingrained hostile defenses. Experience, we believe, does not teach us that others are trustworthy; it teaches us that we had better watch our flanks. The memory of past letdowns can weigh down any sensitive human being, making trust an elusive commodity to acquire.

Worst of all, when negative memories cast a shadow of mistrust over our relationships, we lack the vitality we need to withdraw our attention and act with kindness, as if those shadows were not there. That is why any effective reformation of character has to start with reforming the thought process itself.

Here the power of the mantram makes itself felt. Each time your thoughts start to wander down dark alleyways of the past, by drawing on the mantram you can call them back and point their feet in the direction you really want them to go. Gradually, with practice, your thoughts will wander much less frequently; in time, they may even forget the address of those alleyways they once haunted.

I tend to react sharply when someone does something wrong. How can I give criticism in a way that's kind but still effective?

Criticism can be useful only when it is constructive. Comments can be useful only when they are friendly. Persuasion can be useful only when it is loving. Even from the point of effectiveness, then, unkind comments only add to the problem. Disrespectful criticism makes the situation worse.

Often, of course, it is necessary to make a constructive comment or suggestion. It is the mental attitude—the tone, the respect, the genuine concern—with which we put forward ideas opposed to others' that makes the contribution effective.

I would suggest that whenever you feel you have to make a suggestion opposed to someone else's, take time to get a little detached from the situation by repeating the mantram silently. Then, when your mind is calm, offer your suggestion in a friendly, warmhearted manner with genuine respect. This takes practice, but you will find that it works. It is effective.

Most of us acknowledge this in principle, but in practice it is all too rare. It took years of retraining my mind to learn to listen with respect to opinions utterly opposed to mine, weigh them objectively, and either retain my own opinion or revise or throw it out according to what I learned.

When we are able to do this—to be completely loyal to our own ideals while respecting the integrity of those who differ from us—often they begin to respond. What matters is the friendliness we show, the attention with which we listen—and, more than anything else, the complete absence of any sense of superiority. The superiority complex is most rampant where our sense of separateness is inflamed. The less separate we feel from those around us, the less superior we will feel too. Once we grasp this, every disagreement becomes an opportunity for spiritual growth.

But do people always respond positively? What if they don't?

While I was teaching literature, I had a colleague

What matters is the friendliness we show.

I learned to make myself unshakable in any storm of criticism or ill will.

whose manner and opinions were opposed to mine in every conceivable way. I probably worked on that relationship throughout my tenure on campus. Not only did I learn to stay calm when he attacked me; I went out of my way to be kind to him. I don't think the effort ever made much difference to him. Our relationship never changed: I never did succeed in winning him over.

But that didn't matter. What was thrilling to discover was how much I had grown by trying. Because of that challenge, I learned to make myself unshakable in any storm of criticism or ill will. That skill proved invaluable later, and those years of trial gave me one of the most important lessons I have ever learned in personal relationships.

As you learn to be patient, you get confidence. Next time, when a bigger outburst comes, instead of retaliating, being unkind, or making sarcastic remarks, you use the incident to train the muscles of your patience by repeating the mantram.

Just as we admire people who can lift a thousand pounds, we all benefit by being with somebody who can be patient under attack, kind when opposed, and detached enough to see the situation clearly and compassionately. This is not a sign of weakness; it's a sign of immense strength.

Isn't there a danger that we can go too far with trying to be kind? Putting ourselves at risk, even?

My grandmother was fond of a proverb: "Lack of discrimination is the source of the greatest danger." The capacity to know what should be done and what should not be done is what

"Let me make sure I understand"

I come from a family that joked around a lot, laughed a lot, and didn't take things so personally. We were able to laugh at ourselves and at each other, and see humor in situations that, to my husband, are almost tragic.

By slowing down and taking time to consider what my best response would be, I have been able to train myself to be more careful and considerate of his feelings. Sometimes I ask him, "Tell me again what it is you want." Or, "Let me make sure I understand what you are saying." I then repeat back in my own words what I heard, and he can correct me if I got it wrong.

This has helped both of us to slow down and be more clear with each other, and our communications have become much more loving.

In other situations repeating my mantram helps me to refrain from responding at all, if I am feeling anger, frustration, impatience, etc. This helps me realize I can remain calm and allow him to have his own opinions without me needing to "correct" his thinking or even express my own opinion all the time.

Instead, I look more deeply into his thoughts on the subject and am usually able to see the reason for his opinion more clearly. In this way I am becoming a better listener, and I listen with the intent to learn rather than to respond.

When I review things at the end of the day, I realize how much the eight-point program is influencing me without my realizing it. It's great to know the program is becoming part of my consciousness!

An eSatsang member

mystics call discrimination, and it is one of life's most precious secrets.

In life, we will meet people with whom we have to be careful, using our discrimination. There are many situations in which we must proceed with caution. Just as when we go to the supermarket, there are certain things we must do—always read the labels, always check the price—similarly, everywhere, there is a certain amount of care that we should take, a certain amount of responsibility we should assume.

Exercising discrimination is part of being kind. We need to combine a soft heart with a hard nose.

Exercising discrimination is part of being kind.

I have a full-blown conflict with another manager coming up at work. Do you have any advice?

There is a lot being written these days about conflict resolution, which I am glad to see. But no matter what you read, it will always say in effect, “This is how you deal with your opponent.” Gandhi, St. Francis, St. Teresa would all say, “No. The moment you start thinking about the other person as an opponent, you make it impossible to find a solution.” There are no opponents in a disagreement; there are simply two people facing a common problem.

In other words, you are not in opposite camps. You are in the same camp: the real opponent is the problem.

To apply this, you have to set aside the question of who is to blame. We have a saying in my mother tongue: “It takes two to get married and two to quarrel.” No matter what the circumstances, neither person bears sole responsibility for a quarrel. It is an encouraging outlook, because

if both are responsible, both together can find a solution—not merely a compromise, but a way to resolve the quarrel peacefully.

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

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

Years ago, I watched the Brazilian athlete Pelé play his last game of soccer. He was retiring at the peak of his career, one of the best soccer players the world has seen, and in this last game he was playing with the New York Cosmos against a team for which he had scored his most memorable goals: Santos of Brazil.

For the first half of the game, Pelé played his best for the Cosmos. But the second half had a brilliant touch: he joined his opponents and played his best for them. This is what we should do in a disagreement: play half the time for the other side,

Listen with respect. It may hurt you, it may irritate you, but it is a healing process.

Unite against the problem.

half the time for our own. It is not a question of sacrificing principles; this is the only way to see the whole.

If we could see the game more clearly—and the results were not so tragic—the spectacle of a quarrel would make us laugh. When we played soccer in my village, one of my cousins used to get so excited that he would shoot the ball into his own goal. We used to say, “Never mind the other side; watch out for Mandan.”

When two people quarrel, that’s just what they are doing—scoring against their own side. Whatever the disagreement, we are the home team, the Cosmos—all of us. Our problems, whether personal, national, or environmental, are the

I locked myself in the bathroom

Years ago I remember a disagreement that left me so upset that I first locked myself in the bathroom for some time while I repeated the mantram to try to slow down my racing heart and mind. When that failed to completely do the job, I had to leave the building for about thirty more minutes and many more mantrams to finally quiet my mind. I am still thankful that the mantram saved me from saying or doing something that I would later regret.

I do not find myself in such volatile situations anymore. Just yesterday, however, I had one of those days when nothing seemed to go right. I can remember when such a day would have been filled with long streams of bad language. Instead, I used the mantram, out loud at times when I was alone, and continuously to myself otherwise, until I was able to breathe deep and accept what was happening and deal with the problems and the people involved in a much more gentle manner.

An eSatsang member

visitors. And the mystics say simply, “Support your team. There is the opponent, down at the other end of the field. Unite against the problem; don’t go scrapping among yourselves.”

Have you any emergency advice for when we get into an argument?

Whenever I found myself caught in a foolish situation I used to ask my grandmother, “Granny, if you found yourself in a situation like this, what would you do?” It took years for me to understand her simple answer: “Son, I wouldn’t get into a situation like that.”

This is very practical advice. Don’t get into quarrels in the first place. If you do find yourself getting caught in one, close your mouth, start your mantram, and take the closest exit. If you can, go for a fast walk—even five minutes will help to quiet your mind. You’ll be surprised at how effective this is. And when your mind is quiet, you remember the good things the person has done to you and forget the bad things on which you have been dwelling.

Second, throw yourself into highly active self-less work, with a concentrated mind. For a while, your anger may make it difficult to concentrate. If you are very angry, don’t deal with powerful machinery. But when you are able to concentrate, your anger will have been transformed into power to help others, to deepen your meditation.

Given the state of the world today, are you really sure we can be this good?

The Bhagavad Gita, India’s best-known scripture, describes the lowest stage of human evolution as living in darkness: selfishness, self-will, ignorance

It is by changing ourselves that we help civilization move forward.

of the needs of others, preoccupation with one's own private prepossessions and prejudices whatever the cost to others. Being angry, being greedy, being afraid is living in darkness. In these states of consciousness we are not able to see; that is why we lash out at those around us.

Yet human beings evolve. We don't have to remain where we are, neither as individuals nor as a civilization, because it is by changing ourselves that we help civilization itself move forward. We don't have to say, "I am only what my chromosomes say, what my conditioning is, what my parents and my school made me to be." Instead of clinging to these limitations, we can emerge out of this darkness by drawing upon our deepest resources within.

That is what the practice of the spiritual life means. Through the practice of meditation and allied disciplines, we can slowly push ourselves from darkness into light. Nobody is going to push us from behind; we have to do the pushing ourselves. As we do, we begin to see more clearly, which brings a bit more wisdom into our daily lives.

This is how peace spreads—a quiet but persuasive reminder that no physical limitation can ever set barriers around what the human being can become.

A road to peace and happiness

Turning anger to compassion is a long-duration training for me. Using the eight-point program has helped me identify and understand deeply some of the issues underlying the reasons for my anger in regular situations.

One person in my life in particular has a hook on my anger, but working hard on this relationship has helped tremendously in reducing the frequency and intensity of angry responses in my mind and outside so that much affection and respect has taken the place of anger.

I have written lots of mantrams for the person, mentally turning the negative thoughts that came up into positive, compassionate ones, even though initially this grated on my nerves. One-pointed attention helped to stay in the present and listen without judgment and without pulling up connections to strong resentments. Slowing down helped to be slower to respond to an anger trigger, buying me precious moments to either move away quietly to another room or become quiet and vigilant. Regular meditation helps to slow down the speed of thinking and pulling up of negative connections.

Putting the person first is hard, but I do it over and over again, reminding myself it is my ego that is the culprit, not this person whom the Lord has sent to help me progress in my spiritual growth.

All these efforts have brought me much peace and happiness. The road is long yet, but the sun is shining, the view is often pretty, and the regular breaths of fresh air keep me going.

An eSatsang member



Seeking
the
Same
Self
in All







- The same Self that makes us worthy of respect and love is present equally in everyone around us.
- Indulging in anger is pointing a poison-tipped arrow inward, aimed straight at ourselves.
- Putting others first does not mean saying yes to everyone. Love often expresses itself in saying no.
- Loving opposition has to be done tenderly and without anger or condescension.
- The very best way to change someone is to begin with your own example.

- When we keep pointing a finger of judgment at others, sooner or later that finger of judgment will be aimed point-blank at ourselves.
- There is only one way to make others more loving, and that is by loving more ourselves.
- Whenever you feel you have to make a suggestion opposed to someone else's, take time to get a little detachment first by repeating the mantram silently.
- Exercising discrimination is part of being kind. We need to combine a soft heart with a hard nose.

Last Reminders

- Keep concentrating on what is kind, what is generous, what is selfless in others. This kind of support draws out and strengthens these very qualities.
- When we turn away from ourselves, we begin to see what is really best for those we love.
- When there is a thoughtless action, we can remember how much consideration there has been in the past.
- The secret of the mind is that it is a sponge. Teach the mind to soak itself in love, through meditation and repetition of the mantram.
- People in a hurry cannot be patient – so people in a hurry cannot really love.
- When you want to dwell on your troubles, turn your attention away from yourself to the welfare of those around you.

from Easwaran

- There are no opponents in a disagreement; there are simply two people facing a common problem.
- Unite against the problem; don't go scrapping among yourselves.
- If you find yourself getting caught in a quarrel, close your mouth, start your mantram, and if you can, go for a fast walk – even five minutes will help to quiet your mind.
- Then throw yourself into highly active selfless work, with a concentrated mind.
- Human beings evolve. Through the practice of meditation and allied disciplines, we can slowly push ourselves from darkness into light. This is how peace spreads.



Easwaran in Ramagiri Ashram, 1975.

Original Goodness

By Eknath Easwaran

Just half an hour's walk from my home was a lotus pond so thickly overlaid with glossy leaves and gleaming rose and white blossoms that you could scarcely see the water. In Sanskrit this exquisite flower is called *pankaja*, "born from the mud." In the murky depths of the pond a seed takes root. Then a long, wavering strand reaches upward, groping through the water toward the glimmer of light above. From the water a bud emerges. Warmed by the sun's rays, it slowly opens out and forms a perfect chalice to catch and hold the dazzling light of the sun.

The lotus makes a beautiful symbol for the core of goodness in every human being. Though we are born of human clay, it reminds us, each of us has the latent capacity to reach and grow toward heaven until we shine with the reflected glory of our Maker.

Early in the third century, a Greek Father of the Church, Origen, referred to this core of goodness as both a spark and a divine seed—a seed that is sown deep in consciousness by the very fact of our being human, made in the image of our Creator. "Even though it is covered up," Origen explains,

because it is God that has sowed this seed in us, pressed it in, begotten it, it cannot be extirpated or die out; it glows and sparkles, burning and giving light, and always it moves upward toward God.

Meister Eckhart seized the metaphor and dared take it to the full limits it implies:

The seed of God is in us. Given an intelligent and hard-working farmer, it will thrive and grow up to God, whose seed it is, and accordingly

its fruits will be God-nature. Pear seeds grow into pear trees, nut seeds into nut trees, and God-seed into God.

“Its fruit will be God-nature”! What promise could be more revolutionary? Yet Eckhart, like other great mystics of the Church before and after him, does no more than assure us of his personal experience. The seed is there, and the ground is fertile. Nothing is required but diligent gardening to bring into existence the God-tree: a life that proclaims the original goodness in all creation.

The implications of this statement are far-reaching. Rightly understood, they can lift the most oppressive burden of guilt, restore any loss of self-esteem. For if goodness is our real core, goodness that can be hidden but never taken away, then goodness is not something we have to get. We do not have to figure out how to make ourselves good; all we need do is remove what covers the goodness that is already there.

To be sure, removing these coverings is far from easy. Having a core of goodness does not prevent the rest of personality from occasionally being a monumental nuisance. But the very concept of original goodness can transform our lives. It does not deny what traditional religion calls sin; it simply reminds us that before original sin was original innocence.

That is our real nature. Everything else—all our habits, our conditioning, our past mistakes—is a mask. A mask can hide a face completely; like that iron contraption in Dumas’s novel, it can be excruciating to wear and nearly impossible to remove.

But the very nature of a mask is that it *can* be removed. This is the promise and the purpose of all spiritual disciplines: to take off the mask that hides our real face.

You Are That

This is the teaching of Uddalaka to Shvetaketu, his son:

As by knowing one lump of clay, dear one,
We come to know all things made out of clay –
That they differ only in name and form,
While the stuff of which all are made is clay;
As by knowing one gold nugget, dear one,
We come to know all things made out of gold –
That they differ only in name and form,
While the stuff of which all are made is gold;
As by knowing one tool of iron, dear one,
We come to know all things made out of iron –
That they differ only in name and form,
While the stuff of which all are made is iron –
So through spiritual wisdom, dear one,
We come to know that all of life is one.
In the beginning was only Being,
One without a second.
Out of himself he brought forth the cosmos
And entered into everything in it.
There is nothing that does not come from him.
Of everything he is the inmost Self.
He is the truth; he is the Self supreme.
You are that, Shvetaketu; you are that.

*From the Chandogya Upanishad,
translated by Eknath Easwaran*

An Eight-Point Program

1. Meditation on a Passage

Most of us have grasshopper minds, dispersing our attention, energy, and desires in all sorts of directions and depriving us of the power to draw upon our deeper, richer resources for creative living. Using an inspirational passage for meditation every day, as instructed below, helps to slow down the furious, fragmented activity of the mind so that we can gain control over it. The slow, sustained concentration on the passage drives it deep into our minds. Whatever we drive deep into consciousness, that we become. "All that we are," declares the Buddha, "is the result of what we have thought."

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

Set aside a room in your home to be used only for meditation and spiritual reading. After a while that room will become associated in your mind with meditation, so that simply entering it will have a calming effect. If you cannot spare a room, have a particular corner. But whichever you choose, keep your meditation place clean, well-ventilated, and reasonably austere.

Sit in a straight-backed chair or on the floor and gently close your eyes. If you sit on the floor, you may need to support your back lightly against a wall. You should be comfortable enough to forget your body, but not so comfortable that you become drowsy.

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

Then, in your mind, go slowly through an inspirational passage from the scriptures or the great mystics. I usually recommend the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi:

*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that
I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
It is in dying to self that we
are born to eternal life.*

Do not follow any association of ideas or try to think about the passage. If you are giving your attention to the words, the meaning has to sink in. When distractions come, do not resist them, but try to give more and more attention to the words of the passage. If your mind strays from the

passage completely, bring it back gently to the beginning and start again.

When you reach the end of the passage, you may use it again and again until you have memorized others. It is helpful to have a wide variety of passages for meditation, drawn from all the world's major traditions. I recommend chapters two and twelve of the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord's Prayer, the Twenty-third Psalm, the Beatitudes, and the first chapter of the Dhammapada of the Buddha. I have also translated some of the Upanishads for use in meditation. Whatever you choose, the passage should be positive and practical, chosen from a major scripture or a mystic of the highest stature.

The secret of meditation is simple: you become what you meditate on. When you use the Prayer of St. Francis every day in meditation, you are driving the words deep into your consciousness. Eventually they become an integral part of your personality, which means they will find constant expression in what you do, what you say, and what you think.

2. Repetition of a Mantram

A mantram is a powerful spiritual formula which, when repeated silently in the mind, has the capacity to transform consciousness. There is nothing magical about this. It is simply a matter of practice, as all of us can verify for ourselves.

Every religious tradition has a mantram, often more than one. The name of Jesus itself is a powerful mantram; Catholics also use Hail Mary or Ave Maria. Jews may use *Barukh attah Adonai*; Muslims repeat the name of Allah or *Allahu akbar*. Probably the oldest Buddhist mantram is *Om*

mani padme hum, referring to the "jewel in the heart." And in Hinduism, among many choices, I recommend *Rama, Rama*, which was Mahatma Gandhi's mantram, or the longer mantram which I received from my own spiritual teacher, my grandmother:

*Hare Rama Hare Rama
Rama Rama Hare Hare
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna
Krishna Krishna Hare Hare*

Select a mantram that appeals to you deeply. Then, once you have chosen, do not change your mantram again. Otherwise, as Sri Ramakrishna puts it, you will be like a man digging shallow wells in many places; you will never go deep enough to find water.

Repeat your mantram silently every time you get the chance: while walking, while waiting, while doing mechanical chores like washing dishes, and especially when you are falling asleep. You will find that this is not mindless repetition; the mantram will help to keep you relaxed and alert.

Whenever you are angry or afraid, nervous or worried or resentful, repeat the mantram until the agitation subsides. The mantram works to steady the mind, and all these emotions are power running against you which the mantram can harness and put to work.

3. Slowing Down

In the modern world we are conditioned to live faster and faster. We are only beginning to see that speed makes for tension, surface-living, and insecurity.

It is not enough to talk about this; we must learn

to slow down the pace of our lives. To do this it is a great help to start the day early; that is how you set the pace for the day. Have your meditation as early as possible. Don't rush through breakfast. Allow enough time to get to work without haste. At any time during the day when you catch yourself hurrying, repeat the mantram to slow down.

In order to slow down, it is necessary to gradually eliminate activities outside your job and family responsibilities which do not add to your spiritual growth. At first people feel at a loss for what to do with the time they save by dropping courses in kite-making and flower arrangement. What we lose in activity we gain in intensity by learning to rest content on each moment. The British poet John Donne says, "Be your own home and therein dwell." We can find our center of gravity within ourselves by simplifying and slowing down.

It is essential in this connection not to confuse slowness with sloth, which breeds procrastination and general inefficiency. In slowing down, attend meticulously to details, giving the very best you are capable of even to the smallest undertaking.

4. One-Pointed Attention

People today split their attention in many ways. Background music while we eat, study, or work prevents us from being fully aware of what we are eating, studying, or working at. Eating or drinking while watching a movie curtails our capacity to appreciate the movie. In all these activities the mind is two-pointed. Everything we do should be worthy of our fullest attention. This is making the mind one-pointed, which means utilizing all its resources.

When you are talking with someone, give him your full attention. Look only at him. Listen only to him, no matter what distractions come in the way. When you give someone your complete attention, that helps him to give his best attention to you. Gradually, over a period of years, this becomes an effortless pattern of graceful behavior.

5. Training the Senses

"Stimulate the senses" is the slogan of the mass media around us. One Western historian goes to the extent of calling our modern civilization sensate. Therefore, we have to be extremely vigilant to ensure that we do not come under the tyranny of the senses.

Our five senses are much like puppies. When we let them do as they like, they may end up ruining the whole house. If we train them, they become sensitive, responsive, and free from conditioning. The senses must be obedient if we are to live in freedom. This is not a plea for sense-denial, but for training the senses to be clear and strong. Indulgence blunts the fine edge of the senses, jangles the nervous system, adds to the restlessness of the mind, and clouds the judgment.

In order to train our senses, we have to exercise discriminating restraint over the food we eat, the books we read, the movies we see, the music we listen to, and the places we frequent. Food is an important place to begin. Mahatma Gandhi was fond of pointing out that control of the palate is a valuable aid in controlling the mind. When we misinterpret a sense craving as a hunger signal, we often overload a stomach that is already full. To control such cravings, eat only when hungry and

eat temperately. Have a balanced diet, preferably from a variety of whole-food sources, and eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables. Avoid strongly flavored, spiced, overcooked, and deep-fried foods.

6. Putting Others First

I place a good deal of emphasis on the family, for it provides countless opportunities every day for expanding our consciousness by reducing our self-will, selfishness, and separateness. Dwelling on oneself always constricts consciousness. To the extent that we put the welfare of others first, we break out of the prison of our own separateness.

When we dwell on ourselves, we build a wall between ourselves and others. Those who keep thinking about their needs, their wants, their plans, their ideas cannot help being lonely and insecure. The simple but effective technique I suggest is to learn to put other people first within the circle of your family and friends, where there is already a basis of love on which to build. When husband and wife try to put each other first, for example, they are not only moving closer to each other; they are removing the barriers of their ego-prison, which deepens their relationships with everyone else as well.

7. Spiritual Fellowship

When trying to change our life, we need the support and companionship of others with a similar goal. If you have friends who are meditating along the lines suggested here, you can get together regularly to share a vegetarian meal, meditate, and perhaps read and discuss inspiring,

practical spiritual works. Share your times of entertainment too; relaxation is an important part of spiritual living. Who has ever seen a mystic with a sour face?

8. Spiritual Reading

We are so immersed these days in what the mass media offer that it is very helpful to give half an hour or so each day to reading the scriptures and writings of great mystics like St. Teresa and Sri Ramakrishna who have verified the scriptures in their lives. We can cultivate a universal outlook by steeping ourselves in the spiritual awareness of the mystics of all religions, countries, and epochs. Just before bedtime, after evening meditation, is a particularly good time for such reading, because the thoughts you fall asleep in will be with you throughout the night.

By practicing this eight-point program every day, we can learn “to love the Lord with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might.” It is then that he reveals himself to us in the depths of our consciousness through an act of infinite grace. “He who approaches near to Me one span, I will approach near to him one cubit; and he who approaches near to Me one cubit, I will approach near to him one fathom; and whoever approaches Me walking, I will come to him running; and he who meets Me with sins equivalent to the whole world, I will greet him with forgiveness equal to it.” So says the Sufi mystical document *Mishkat al-Masabih*. Or as they have been saying down the ages in India, when we take one step towards the Lord, he takes seven steps towards us. But this first step we must take.

Retreats and Webinars in 2016

“After I’d been meditating for a few months, my friend who had told me about Blue Mountain suggested I try a retreat. It was a marvelous day which helped with my new meditation practice. I listened to the questions that other new meditators asked and was encouraged by the thoughtful replies. The atmosphere was peaceful and yet enthusiastic. What surprised me was the quality of the whole experience. It felt like time outside time and something that was precious.” – *A retreatant*

At our retreat house in Tomales (1 hour north of San Francisco)

Introductory Weekends: Everything you need to establish a successful daily practice. February 19–21, June 10–12, August 12–14

Young Adult Weekends: Inspiration and spiritual community with others in their 20s and 30s. February 12–14, November 4–6

Returnee Weekends: An easy-to-schedule spiritual boost. March 18–20, April 29–May 1, September 9–11, October 7–9

Senior Half-Weeks: Learn how to make the most out of your retirement years; or, at any age, how to face a serious illness with courage and grace. March 4–8, August 5–9

Weeklongs: Systematically deepen and replenish your practice with other longtime passage meditators. April 16–22, May 14–20, July 9–15, August 20–26, September 24–30, October 15–21

See dates and locations for regional retreats online or call: www.easwaran.org/retreats • 800.475.2369

There is a sliding scale for retreat fees. For a scholarship, please write to financial.aid@easwaran.org

Introductory Webinar Series www.easwaran.org/webinar

This year we’ve been delighted to welcome a total of 872 friends from 34 countries who joined us online for spiritual fellowship, inspiration and instruction. Responding to your feedback, we’ve scheduled our 2016 webinars at different times to accommodate various time zones. We’ve also extended our Q&A sessions, so there will be more time for questions. Everyone is welcome!

Free Webinar 1 Learn to Meditate: Learn how to meditate on a passage; find out why this method is so powerful, and what it can do for you. January 23, September 17

Free Webinar 2 Make the Most of Your Meditation: Learn about the other points in Easwaran’s program for spiritual living; find how they can help you stay calm, kind, and focused throughout the day. March 12, October 8





Anger is power, and we can learn to harness this power by putting each other first. Whatever the flavor of our anger—irritability, rage, stubbornness, belligerence, or sullen silence—it can all be transformed into compassion and understanding. Those we live with will certainly benefit from that, and so will we.

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