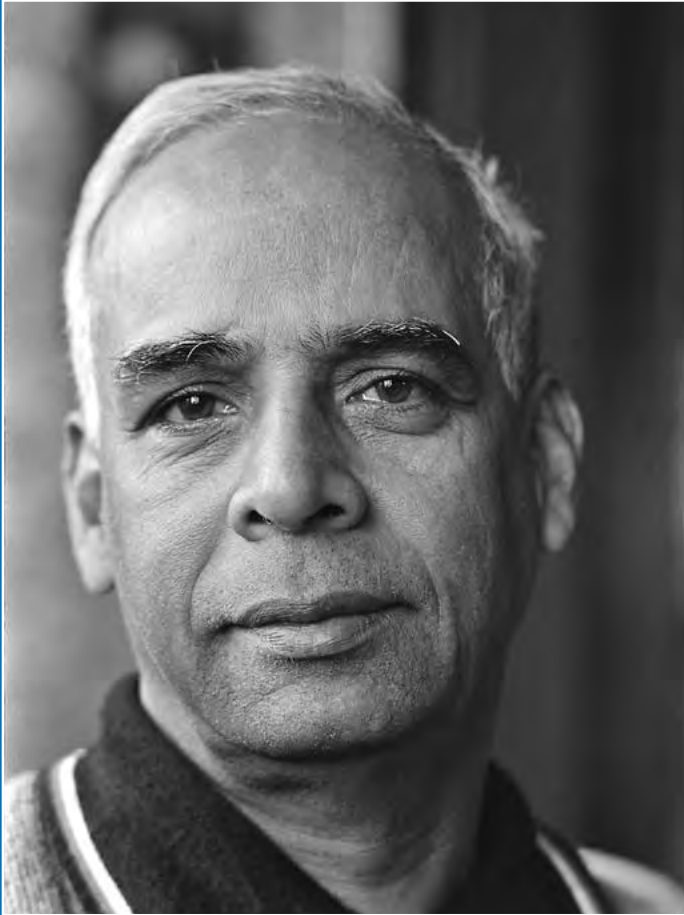


Eknath Easwaran's

Blue Mountain Journal

Meditation & Spiritual Living



Summer 2016

Forgiving Others, Forgiving Ourselves

In This Issue



Eknath Easwaran called this the age of anger, and anger the biggest problem of our times. For him the word included all sorts of subtler feelings simmering below the surface of consciousness, ready to burst out at the slightest provocation: ill will, hostility, resentment, enmity, bitterness at how other people or even life itself is treating us.

This takes its toll on those around us, but the first casualty is to ourselves. Anger, Easwaran said, invades the mind like a virus. If unchecked, it can utterly destroy peace of mind. But we have invincible defenses: “When the internal viruses of resentment and hostility attack our consciousness, the mind’s immune system will be able to vanquish them through patience and forgiveness.”

We think of forgiveness as a response to wrongs, but the forgiveness the mystics plead for is universal: a state of mind that Easwaran said absorbs ill will as trees absorb carbon dioxide in the air and transform it into life-giving oxygen. This lifts the burden of anger from the heart, but if we are striving for Self-realization it is much more. “On the spiritual path,” Easwaran enjoins us, “the very first attribute we are asked to cultivate is forgiveness” – because the Lord, the one same Self, is present in each of us without exception, so that insofar as we are divided against others, we are divided within ourselves.

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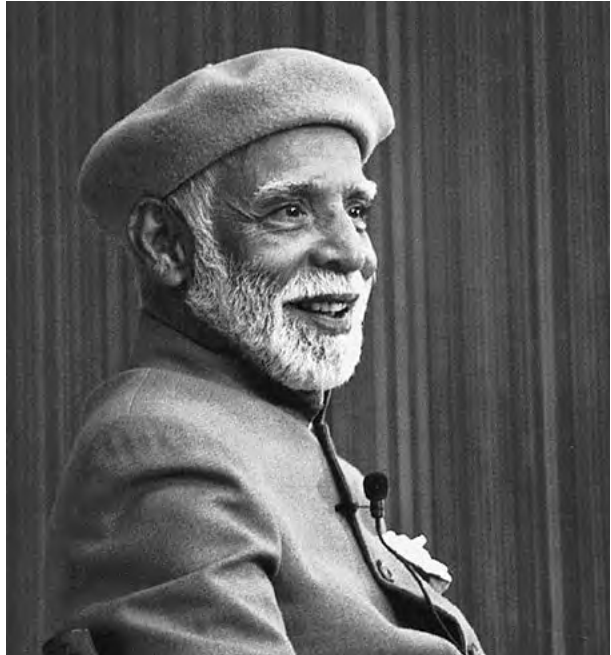
In these pages Easwaran offers several suggestions for how to cultivate this lofty state, but two in particular stand out. First, he says, whenever a bubble of resentment or hostility arises in your mind, use the mantram as an eraser. The memory won't go away, but the mantram can remove any poison it may have left.

Second is the keynote of his method of meditation. "Training your attention," he says, "teaches you to forgive – not just with a superficial shaking of hands but from the depths of your heart, wiping the slate clean. All this is what meditating on an inspirational passage can do."

With that in mind, I would like to offer on page 4 a little prayer that Easwaran composed toward the end of his life and offered to a friend to memorize. Because it came straight from his heart, it has an appeal that speaks deeply to ours, making it perfect for meditation.

Christine Easwaran

For the Board of Trustees



A Prayer for Meditation

May I open my eyes in the morning
with the holy name on my lips.
May I see God everywhere and in everyone.
May I never hurt anyone and may
I never be afraid of anyone.
May I be inspired to choose persuasive
words, loving language, creative and
positive thoughts, to carry peace and
good will throughout the world.
May my meditation deepen, so I can
draw upon the source of all life.
May I fall asleep at night with the holy
name on my lips, to heal my wounds and
prepare me for another day of service.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Sri Sri Easwaran'.

Forgiving Others, Forgiving Ourselves

The marvel of forgiveness is this: when we can completely forgive someone the tantrum they threw this afternoon, we are at the same time beginning to forgive ourselves for every tantrum we have ever thrown at others.

You can see how practical a step it is to take. All those other people may long since have forgotten what we did and said — maybe some of them didn't really care much in the first place. But deep in our own minds, every single storm has left its mark. Every storm has burst a little hole in consciousness through which angry thoughts, angry words, and angry acts gradually seep into our daily life.

In this sacred act of forgiveness we are mending thousands of these little holes. It relieves us of part of the tremendous burden that all of us carry within, healing our consciousness and taking the pressure of anxiety off our mind and our nervous system. And it makes us much less likely to get provoked the next time someone rubs us the wrong way. This is the miracle forgiveness works.

Only those who forgive others will enjoy the healing power of forgiveness in themselves, because in showing mercy to others we are being merciful with ourselves as well. The reason is simple: only then are we abiding by life's most fundamental law, that all of us are one. If I give love to others it means I stand to benefit from that love as much as they. Not necessarily immediately, not necessarily directly, but that love has to come back to me; for I have added to the

measure of love in the world, the mystics say, and I am part of that whole. Similarly, if I add meanness, stinginess, resentment, hostility, then sooner or later that sort of treatment will be shown to me.

This is not so occult as it may sound. After all, when someone treats us unkindly, isn't it natural that we begin to avoid that person, speak curtly, even be unkind ourselves? When a person is regularly unkind, it conditions our expectations; then, when that person surprises us with something thoughtful — it does happen! — we may shun him anyway, simply out of habit. It is the same with kindness: when we can count on a person to be loving, we give our love freely in return, and allow a wide margin for those rare times when he or she might act otherwise. That is how our responses to life come back to us.

In Hindu and Buddhist mysticism, this commonsense principle is called the law of karma. The word *karma* has been much misunderstood, but its literal meaning is simply action, something done. So instead of using exotic language, we might as well refer to the “law of action,” which states that everything we do — even everything we think, since our thoughts condition our behavior — has consequences. It is a law of life, which no one has stated more clearly than Jesus: “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be meted unto you.” Paul puts it more tersely: “As we sow, so shall we reap.” If we sow mercy, we shall receive it in ample harvest.

Never in the history of human relations has any problem ever been solved except through greater

Everything we do, everything we think, has consequences.

love, endurance, and forgiveness on the part of some person.

Could you tell us how you learned to forgive?

I'll tell you what methods I use. First, I often get letters from people who have been hurt by a parent, partner, child, or friend ten or twenty years ago. Those little memories have become obsessions, inflated far out of proportion, like a huge balloon. The episode plays itself over and over in the mind: what he did to me, and what I am going to do to him when he gets in my way again.

We are all subject to this stimulus and response reaction; to change it, we have to break the nexus between the two. Unfortunately, that connection can never be broken intellectually. Although the intellect is a most valuable instrument, it is not well connected with the will. That explains why even brilliant scholars and great artists can behave just like ordinary people when they have emotional problems. The stimulus response nexus lies much deeper in consciousness than the intellect can reach.

Often these resentments are buried so deep in consciousness that we are not aware of the extent to which they undermine our security, drain our vitality, and interfere with our personal relationships.

Here it is not very effective to analyze the wrongs we have suffered and then forgive them one by one. If I may say so, often the wrongs are not wrongs at all; it is only that our self-will has been violated, not infrequently because we failed to understand what the other person did or said.

A Thousand Acts of Forgiveness

A friend's ex-husband said, "Marriage is a thousand acts of forgiveness a day." Perhaps they needed a thousand and one, which is understandable to me because spousal forgiveness seems to be an ongoing project, with endless opportunities for repetition (kind of like the mantram). In our most intimate relationships, it is hard to get to the bottom of forgiveness.

Every time I think I've completely forgiven my husband for a particularly knotty trespass, that old devil resentment sneaks back in, sometimes wearing the disguise of righteous indignation or self pity, sometimes roaring into outrage. Usually it's irritation or dismay over some lesser trespass that opens the door to the interloper. Then I need to return to my mantram, to remind myself of all that is beautiful in my husband, of all that is good in our marriage, and of all the mistakes that I have committed for which I need forgiveness.

It's a sobering journey, this forgiveness business. Yet, St. Francis maintains that forgiveness is the greatest joy in life, and I believe him. Spiritual work is always fraught with paradox. He also says that it is in pardoning that we are pardoned. In a marriage (where Easwaran teaches that we are to complete one another rather than compete with one another), this reciprocity is front and center. My "other half" is part of me; what I do to him, I do to myself.

Fortunately, we don't have to be perfect to carry this out. We get better at it by trying to do it, even if at times it feels like wading through cement. To the extent that I can forgive my beloved spouse for his mistakes, I can forgive myself for mine. That is a motivating reality! It's easier with smaller injuries: a harsh word, a misunderstood intent, a pointed criticism. Good to make a habit of letting those go.

Forgiveness is a putting others first endeavor that (like all such endeavors) benefits me. Self-forgiveness is perhaps the hardest and most necessary part of the process. With the three E's—effort, enthusiasm, and Easwaran—it can be done.

A member of our Affiliate program

Instead, it is much more effective not to dwell on the past at all.

Second, whenever painful thoughts arise about injustices done to you in the past — and all of us have suffered injustices, just as all of us have inflicted them — my suggestion is, don't speak about it, don't write about it; as soon as possible, go for a mantram walk. Start repeating "Rama, Rama" or "Jesus, Jesus" or "Om mani padme hum" or "Allahu akbar." It will be a real wrestling match between your painful memory and the mantram, but I am prepared to bet my shirt on the mantram. The memory will fight back, but in the long run it hasn't a chance.

Most of us perhaps are not even dimly aware of how, under the surface level of consciousness, old resentments keep burning, old hostilities keep flaming up. A sudden agitation, or a sudden depression, is often caused by old resentments which we still harbor in the depths of our consciousness.

I once saw a big book entitled *The Dynamics of Forgiveness*, and I could not help wondering what the author would have done to me if I had written a strong review against it. He probably would have come to the Center and given me a piece of his mind. Writing books about forgiveness, reading about forgiveness, and talking about forgiveness do not enable us to forgive. When we rely upon our own capacities, I do not think it is easy for us to forgive, but when we repeat the mantram, we are calling upon the Lord to help us transform all our resentments into love.

Finally, meditate regularly, morning and evening, using the great inspirational passages from the mystics. These passages have filled every nook



Easwaran at a retreat, 1988.

and cranny of my consciousness with noble ideals so that there is no possibility of any harmful thought or any injurious image getting in.

I have very little doubt that unless you go deep in meditation to forgive, even for people who say they have forgiven, the embers of resentment will still cause a lot of trouble inside.

So if you feel angry with somebody, sit down and go through an appropriate passage. Select passages from my anthology *God Makes the Rivers to Flow*, particularly the Buddha's "Cross the River Bravely," the "Invocations" of Ansari of Herat, "The Wonderful Effect of Divine Love" from Thomas à Kempis, and, of course, "The Way of Love" from Chapter 12 of the Bhagavad Gita. When you meditate on a passage that is very healing in its effect, the passage sinks below the injurious thought, which means that it is only a matter of time before you can say no to it.

The ability to forgive is the hallmark of the highly evolved human being. There is no more exacting skill. And yet it is nothing more, essentially, than the seemingly prosaic capacity of withdrawing attention at will and placing it where you choose. Whatever distressing words have been spoken, whatever unkind acts have been performed, the mind that has been trained in deep meditation can turn quietly away and focus instead on the loving words, the thoughtful acts, of a happier hour.

Like any skill, this one develops with practice. Suppose you are meditating on the words of Thomas à Kempis: "Love bears evenly all that is uneven." Suddenly a much louder passage is ringing in your ears. It is as if a car with huge speakers had pulled up next to yours at a

Go deep in meditation to forgive.

Give your attention more and more to the words of the passage.

stoptlight, playing a tape of something someone has said to you that day: “Charles, I think it’s time both of us started seeing other people!” or “Marilou, you’re just not working out as an administrator. I’ve decided you’d be more effective back in your old post.”

The more attention you give to these dissonant voices, the louder they’ll get. The only way to turn them down is to give your attention more and more to the words of the passage: “Love bears evenly all that is uneven.” It is a simple skill, but it has wide applications. When you have a severe personal problem, you are naturally inclined to dwell on it, and when you do, it looms all the larger. Solutions seem more and more distant. Most problems are rather unassuming when you see them in their native costume. They only become unmanageable when you can’t stop brooding on them, dressing them up as Count Dracula or Lady Macbeth.

The mystics are unanimous: love of God makes itself seen and felt as love of our fellow creatures. Only when you have lowered all the barriers between yourself and others will there be no barrier between you and the Lord within. Deliberately, then, from the very first, you begin to chip away at those walls in consciousness. You

The Wonderful Effect of Divine Love

Thomas à Kempis

Love is a great thing, yea, a great and thorough good; by itself it makes every thing that is heavy, light; and it bears evenly all that is uneven. For it carries a burden which is no burden, and makes every thing that is bitter, sweet and tasteful.

do it in little ways, throughout the day, by trying to see the needs of others as clearly as your own and to act in harmony with them.

I'm still worried that if I keep trying to see the needs of others – of difficult family members, for instance – they will take advantage of me.

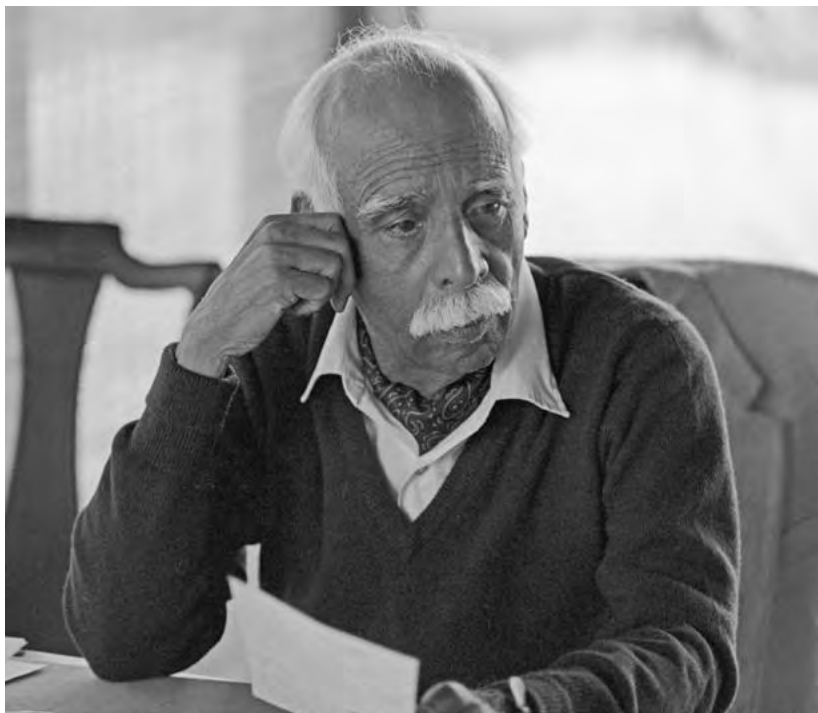
Bearing with people, especially those who really do cause us problems, is the essence of forgiveness. It is not particularly helpful to do this with a feeling of martyrdom, either; we need to bear with people cheerfully.

But this does not mean making ourselves into a doormat. Letting people take undue advantage of us is not helpful for them any more than it is for us. Instead, we can learn to bear with them and at the same time improve the situation with their help.

What if the person I need to forgive still has the power to harm me in some way?

When you know somebody is capable of harming you, it's good to pray for the person, but to keep away from him or her.

By developing the habit of forgiveness, we can turn the light of forgiveness on anyone. But in practical daily living you have to remember who is capable of hurting you deeply and not give that person an opportunity, because it's not only you who will be hurt; the other person will be creating bad karma for himself or herself too.



Easwaran, 1985.

What kind of prayer should we use? And will it really help?

Even after many, many years of meditation, whenever somebody offends me, I immediately ask God to bless that person. It has become natural with me.

I would ask every one of you when you receive an affront or an unkind word or an unkind act from anybody, true or imagined — because some of the more difficult ones are imagined — repeat your mantram and ask God to bless that person. It may not help that person, but it will certainly help you.

Even if you feel a little displeased with somebody, which is very human, make sure that you write one page of the mantram for that person.

What if we find ourselves brooding about someone from our past – what should we do then?

When you feel a tendency to be disagreeable, it is a bubble from the depths coming to burst on the surface of consciousness to ask us to learn to forgive. I find that the writing of the mantram during times of agitation like this is very helpful.

Forgiveness seems to require a real leap of faith in human nature. I'm not sure I have enough faith.

St. Francis once said that anyone who doesn't know how to forgive has lost the greatest source of joy in life. Today we are practically encouraged to do just the opposite: to be resentful, to be hostile, to retaliate and nurse our grievances and never forget past wrongs. Books, movies, newspapers, and magazines go on repeating messages whose impact is to make the human being incapable of forgiveness. Even if we say "Let's shake hands and be quits," the embers of resentment and revenge are burning deep inside, where they can lead to disease in mind and body as surely as a bacillus. Resentments eat away our vitality; hostility undermines our immune system.

"Resentment is human nature," we may say. Yet nothing in human nature requires us to be vengeful; that is the most important thing we can learn from St. Francis's life. Even if this is the way we are now, we can change.

We can look on the St. Francis Prayer as crib notes for a comprehensive curriculum intended to teach this higher mode of living. The only way to be an instrument of peace, Francis is telling us, is by sowing love wherever we find hatred,

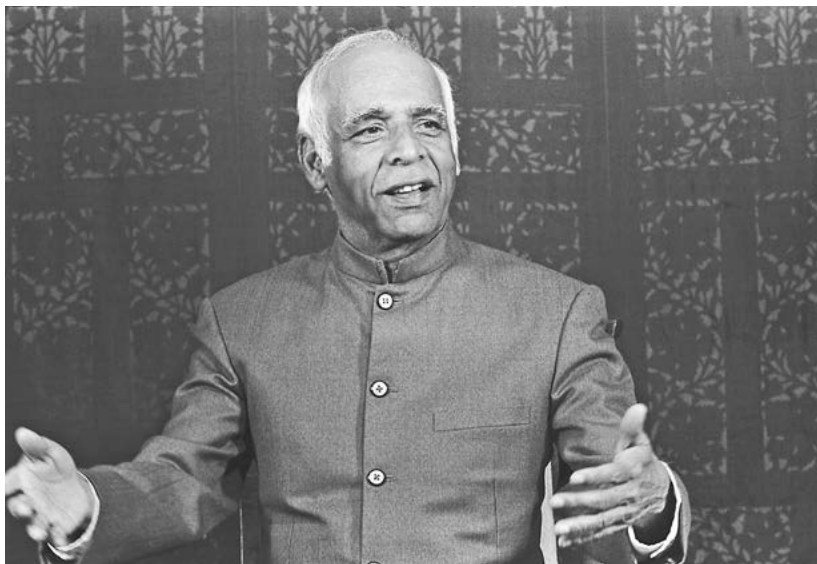
beginning with ourselves. That means learning to forgive, and that in turn requires faith — in oneself, in others, in the power of goodness. Lack of faith in human nature brings despair, but faith brings hope — and anyone who brings hope into a dark world is welcomed as a source of light.

Lifting the burden of despair like this is the only way the world can be transformed, because only an unburdened heart can have the strength and courage to love when circumstances seem hopeless.

I did not have much faith in my early days, and what little I had was lost when I went to college. That is where I lost my faith in faith also. So don't blame yourself if you have no faith. You can reclaim your faith in others and in yourself by practicing it, never giving in to negativity, hopelessness, or despair. This kind of faith cannot only move mountains; as Gandhi would say, it can change the face of the world.

Reclaim your faith in others and in yourself by practicing it.

Easwaran, 1970s.



We see only a tiny corner of life. What guides our steps is “what abides: these three, faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love.”

As I believe G. K. Chesterton said, love means pardoning the unpardonable, or it is no virtue at all. Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all. And faith means believing the incredible, or it is no virtue at all.

These are the heights we can attain when we drive the St. Francis Prayer into the depths of consciousness through years of meditation. We will be able to forgive anybody and everybody, and in our forgiveness educate them. We will be able to love everybody and anybody, and in that love we will educate them. Unconditional love may act slowly, but it overcomes all obstacles. This is the only force for change that endures, because it brings a lasting change of heart.

The Prayer of St. Francis

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.

Betrayal and Forgiveness: Young Adults Discuss

A member of our Young Adult eSatsang asks:

What does Easwaran teach/say about forgiveness when someone we loved, have known for years and trusted with everything, has betrayed us? How does one balance idealism and reality?

Young adults respond:

From New York:

I am sorry that you had to go through an experience of betrayal — no one deserves to go through that type of pain. I found reading “Strength in the Storm” immensely helpful in such a situation. I kept that book on my nightstand and looked to it each time I struggled with processing the experience. My biggest challenge was dealing with the anger I felt towards the person so that I could move on to forgiveness. I found a combination of Easwaran’s video clips, soothing (positive) music, and the tincture of time to be helpful. I will pray and hope for the happiness that is hopefully on your horizon. *Om mani padme hum* :)

From Berkeley, California:

In a slightly similar, small situation, I found a few things helpful. I avoid unhealthy isolation. Sometimes, I just walk through crowded streets. Other times, I intentionally put myself in groups and satsangs when I really don’t want to.

Angry mantram-chanting, in my mind and out loud. :) I especially say it when I have trouble falling asleep at night, or when I kept waking up during the night. To this day, this is some of the best mantram-ing I’ve ever done ...

I pray a LOT, not to fix the problem (that doesn’t seem to work), but for strength, joy and peace of mind no matter what I have to go through.

I avoid the company of those who may focus on only putting the other person down. Making myself feel even more separate doesn’t help me feel better.

From Sydney, Australia:

I'm really sorry that you have to go through this awful experience. Easwaran recommends getting clarity first when we are under any sort of turmoil. At such times we can repeat the mantram to calm our mind. When I went through a falling out with a friend, someone recommended writing a page of mantrams with my name on it at the top and doing this every day. If you are really daring, write the name of the person you are trying to forgive and devote another page for that person.

While Easwaran asks us to forgive those who betray us, he makes it clear that we should stand up for ourselves when someone is taking advantage of us and not be a 'doormat'. I'm not sure if this applies to you but just throwing it out there.

It's hard to truly forgive someone, and yet it's absolutely necessary. Easwaran reminds us that "as we grow older and our family and friends begin to pass away, we see how relentlessly time is pursuing all of us. There is no time to quarrel, no time to feel resentful or estranged."

When I was traveling overseas recently, I met a really nice dude and became good friends very quickly. At the end of our travels, he did something — I wouldn't call it betrayal, but something dishonest and selfish — and I was furious with him. I repeated some mantrams — not nearly as many as I should have — and I tried to forgive him, but the best I could manage was politeness. There was little warmth when I spoke to him last.

I returned home, and a few weeks later, I found out he had passed away. This guy was only 26, healthy and full of life. He was very kind to me and my family, but I had reduced this generous person to one mistake, and I couldn't truly forgive him. I'm not even sure I said goodbye. When I think about him sometimes my heart feels heavy. I couldn't help but recall the Prayer of St. Francis, "It is in pardoning that we are pardoned." I finally understood that line, not just intellectually, but in my heart.

Streaming mantrams your way from Down Under! *Om Mani Padme Hum. Om Mani Padme Hum.*

Cross the River Bravely

The Dhammapada

Cross the river bravely; conquer all your passions.
Go beyond the world of fragments and know the
deathless ground of life.

Cross the river bravely; conquer all your passions.
Go beyond your likes and dislikes and all fetters will
fall away.

Who is a true brahmin? That one I call a brahmin
who has neither likes nor dislikes and is free from the
chains of fear.

Who is a true brahmin? That one I call a brahmin
who has trained the mind to be still and reached the
supreme goal of life.

The sun shines in the day; the moon shines in the
night. The warrior shines in battle, the brahmin in
meditation. But day and night the Buddha shines in
radiance of love for all.

That one I call a brahmin who has shed all evil. I call
that one a recluse whose mind is serene; a wanderer,
whose heart is pure.

That one I call a brahmin who is never angry, never
causes harm to others even when harmed by them.

That one I call a brahmin who clings not to pleasure.
Do not cause sorrow to others; no more sorrow will
come to you.

The Saint

The Dhammapada

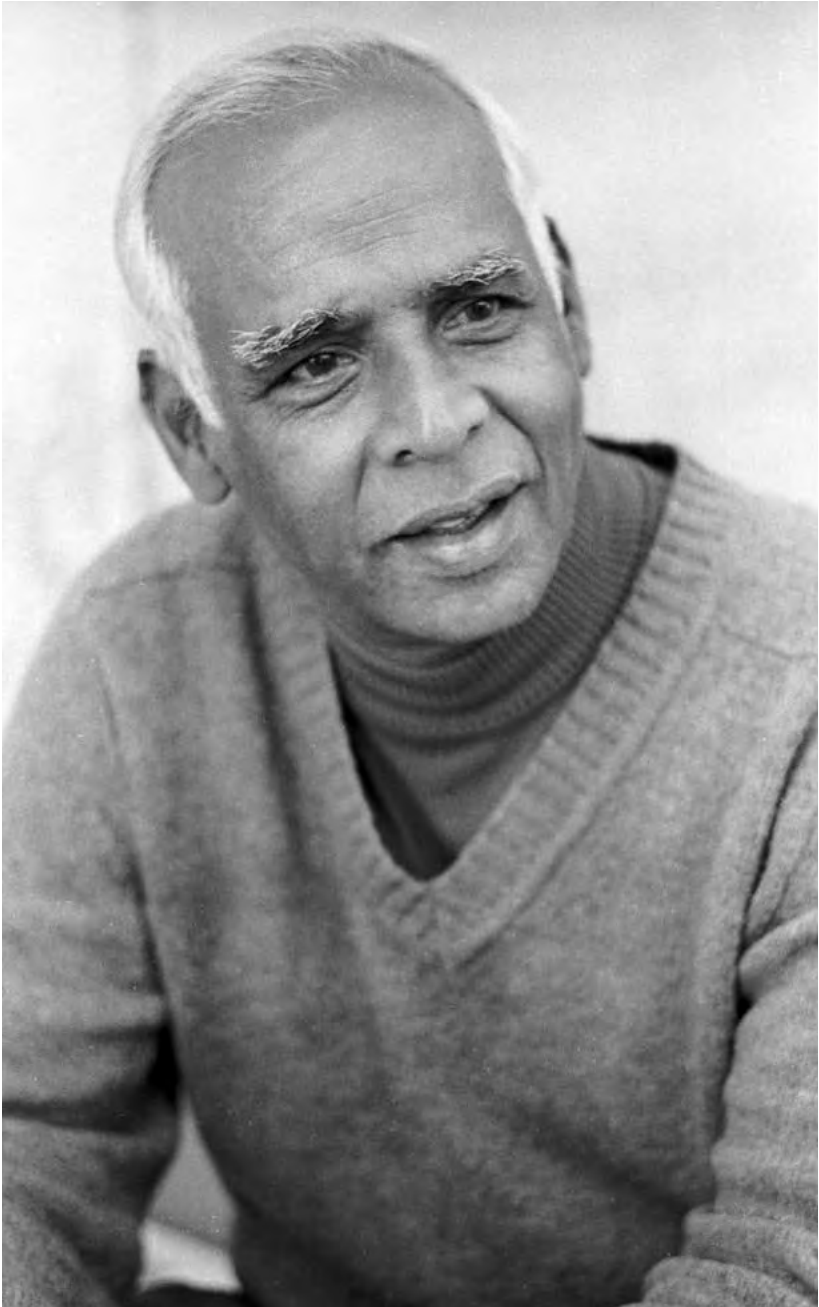
Even the gods envy the saints, whose senses obey them like well-trained horses and who are free from pride. Patient like the earth, they stand like a threshold. They are pure like a lake without mud, and free from the cycle of birth and death.

Wisdom has stilled their minds, and their thoughts, words, and deeds are filled with peace. Freed from illusion and from personal ties, they have renounced the world of appearance to find reality. Thus have they reached the highest.

They make holy wherever they dwell, in village or forest, on land or at sea. With their senses at peace and minds full of joy, they make the forests holy.



Young adults on a mantram walk.



Easwaran, 1970.

Ten Tips from Easwaran on How to Forgive

1. Don't harbor grudges — use the mantram

First, we can try our best not to harbor grudges. One suggestion is that when you have a falling out with someone, instead of deciding on the spot that you are not going to come within ten feet of that person, try going out for a really fast walk, repeating the mantram in your mind until the immediate wave of anger rolls over you. If a fast walk is not feasible, sit down quietly to repeat the mantram.

2. Remember the good things

Then you can make a simple effort to recall some of the good things that person has done for you. He may have let it go by when you said something particularly unkind to him one time; or perhaps when you got sick she took care of you. Anger makes us utterly forget all these incidents, so that for a while we see only the dark side. Even though we may be nursing a real injury, when we remind ourselves that the past has brought us kindness and aid from this person, our anger will find it difficult to burn for very long.

3. Move closer

Even if there is some resentment in your mind, you can move closer to people; you can help them. It is by repeating this simulated kindness over and over again that you become naturally kind, naturally forgiving.

Resentment is contagious, but kindness is even more so.

4. Spread kindness

Resentment will defend itself with a foolish argument: “Well, it’s my own business.” Not at all. In the first place, unless the person against whom you nurse the grudge is extremely secure, you are making that person into an agitated missile who is going to injure a lot of others. This is no exaggeration. Resentment is contagious, much more so than a virus. In a home where it is allowed to fester, everybody gets infected: the children, the children’s playmates, even the dog.

But kindness is even more contagious.

Whenever people see somebody facing harsh treatment with quiet security, with a kind of infectious good humor, they get infected too. “How I wish I could do that!” they marvel. We can use kindness to inoculate those around us against the dread disease of resentment.

5. Be patient

No matter how much we feel we have been wronged, no matter how much we feel others may not appreciate us, we should learn to be patient and to forgive — not only because it helps those around us, but because it helps us to free ourselves from the pall of suspicion and resentment. Gradually, as our eyes become clearer, this can save us a good deal of embarrassment.

Because of the distorting mirror of self-will, most of us are liable to complain at some time or other: “Why is so-and-so always rude to me? I said hello to her this morning and she didn’t even answer.” It is only when we learn that the person in question had received bad news that morning, or was up all night with her baby, that we realize we had not been wronged at all. It

was only because we were so wrapped up in ourselves that we took her silence personally.

6. Work on understanding

Understanding is the first thing to jump out the window when two emotionally involved people get into a quarrel. “He just doesn’t understand me!” is a grumble that frequently reaches my ears. St. Francis, I suspect, would reply, “What does it matter? The real question is, do you understand him? Have you tried to understand his point of view?” The honest answer would usually be no. Strong emotions plug up our ears like those foam earplugs which expand into the opening of your ear to prevent even a single wave of sound from getting through.

I have yet to hear of anyone who did not understand his or her own side of a quarrel in minute detail. “See, my hay fever is acting up now because my prescription ran out, and I had this terrific headache from our youngest son yelling at me. So when my husband came into the kitchen and slammed the door for no reason, I just let him have it.” Our private prosecuting attorney in the mind has built up an open-and-shut case. That

The Way of Love: The Bhagavad Gita

That one I love who is incapable of ill will
And returns love for hatred.
Living beyond the reach of I and mine
And of pleasure and pain, full of mercy,
Contented, self-controlled, firm in faith,
With all their heart and all their mind given to me –
With such as these I am in love.

is the problem: we shut the case too soon. As any experienced judge knows, every case has two sides. Fairness demands that we give equal time to the defense, who is inside us too. The other side deserves the same hearing and the same benefit of the doubt that we give ourselves as a matter of course. This is detachment. If we can practice it, quarrels can be settled amicably before they ever come before a jury.

Late in his life Francis found himself compelled to give over his place as head of the order to Brother Elias, who thereafter became very keen on improving the conduct of his Brothers. When Elias came to him with complaints and plans to penalize some of them, Francis gave him strong advice: "See to it that no Brother in the whole world, however he may have sinned, is permitted to go from you without forgiveness if he asks for it. And if he does not ask for forgiveness, then ask him if he does not want it. And even if he comes before your eyes a thousand times with sin, love him more than you do me, that you may draw him to the Lord. 'For the healthy need no physician, but only those who suffer illness.'"

The forgiveness Francis is prescribing here is not a matter merely of saying "I forgive you; let bygones be bygones." No amount of talking can prevent the seed of resentment from taking hold in our heart. True forgiveness requires that we not only not take personally any harsh thing said or done to us, but that we make an all-out effort to understand the other person's situation. Then, even if we get angry for a few minutes and think "That Mortimer!" we know it will soon turn to "Well, he comes from a discordant home, and nobody showed him how to object nicely." When

this happens, we know that resentment doesn't stand a chance.

But Francis is zealous in his recommendation that we follow up this forgiving with genuine acts of kindness, which can actually cure the impulse of the other person to say or do something harsh again.

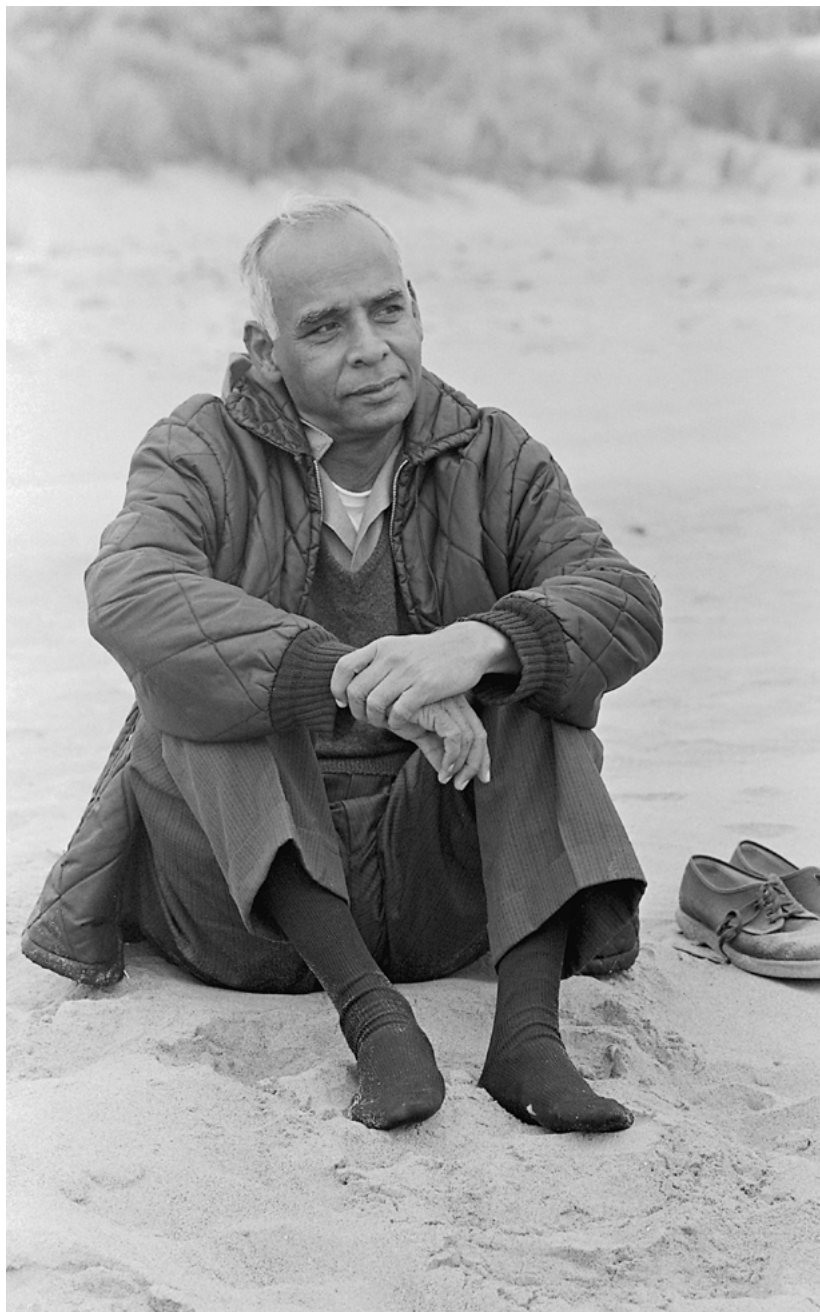
7. Recognize your own self-will

Through meditation, as our minds become calmer and self-will fades, detachment comes and our vision clears. Only then can we see that most of the obstacles to forgiving others do not arise from ideological or philosophical differences. Put plainly, obstacles arise because we want to impose our way, our self-will, on others, and they want to impose their self-will on us.

Seeing this clearly goes a long way toward releasing forgiveness; as Voltaire said, "To understand all is to forgive all." But something more than clear seeing is required, and that is the will. It takes a good deal of inner strength to remain calm and compassionate in the face of fierce opposition, never losing your balance or resorting to harsh language. But when you can do this, a kind of miracle takes place which all of us can verify. The other person becomes calmer, his eyes clear a little too; soon communication is established once again.

8. Stand by those you love

When two people love each other deeply, if one makes a mistake, the other doesn't lose respect or say, "I'm going to do that too; then we'll be even." That is the time to stand by the person you love and offer support: not conniving at the



Easwaran, 1967.

mistake, but helping that person to overcome it and grow. This is a great art. It cannot be done in judgment or condescension, which means we have to get the ego very much out of the way.

When you have developed the capacity to step back from the turmoil of an offended mind and look at the situation with even a small measure of objectivity, you can make a fascinating discovery. Often the person who is causing us trouble is simply making a call for help — calling in the only language he or she knows. Underneath the abrasiveness is a hidden message: “Please move closer to me. Support me. Bear with me.”

Most of us are not able to draw on a deeper will and a higher wisdom to do this; therefore our relations go wrong and we run away. There is no reason to bemoan this. I have made many mistakes in my ignorance, and so has everybody else I know. But from now onwards, by building our lives on meditation, we can learn to stand firm in situations where we used to crumble, stand loving and respectful when we used to get resentful, hostile, or vindictive.

For me this is the perfect test of love: can I forget my own hurt feelings and ensure their welfare, no matter how he or she has treated me? If I can, my love for that person is secure. My friend, or partner, or son, or daughter will be so certain of my desire to do what is best for them that even if I do something wrong, they will not hold it against me; they will know that I am incapable of doing anything to harm them. This trust is the basis of perfect relationships anywhere.

Step back from the turmoil of the offended mind.

9. Aim for the welfare of the whole

We need not expect perfection. Robert Browning says in a magnificent simile that it is enough just to draw one small arc; the Lord will complete the circle. He will take into account the times in which we live — horrible times; just look at any paper to see: money and sex played up constantly, meaningless violence all over the globe. He will make allowances for our country, our culture, our physical and intellectual limitations, and then he will say, “Just do your best to forget yourself in the interests of those around you. Aim always for the welfare of the whole. If you can do that much, you will be a tremendous force for unity, harmony, and peace.”

10. Learn to forgive from the depths

Our age has been rightly called the age of anger. Look at what is taking place in the many disturbed areas of the world today. People have not forgotten animosities or forgiven hostilities which stretch back hundreds of years. Such tragedies do not belong simply to this century; often they are stories of generations of hostility.

Here is where Francis would play peacemaker on an international scale by saying, “Close down the doors of history. Let the past bury its dead. Build the future from today onwards by forgiving all that has been done by one race or ethnic community to another.” It is by this kind of forgiveness, and only by this kind of forgiveness, that international good will grows.

I would like every one of us to learn to forgive from the depths of our consciousness. Even when we feel that we have forgiven, I have very little doubt that in the depths of consciousness the

embers burn without our knowledge, without even our awareness. This is why quarrels burst out at the slightest provocation: not because of the provocation, but because the embers are burning, and until these embers are extinguished, friction will go on even in our own consciousness.

Our mode of meditation on inspirational passages is very effective in solving this problem. The mind gradually is filled with elevating images which begin to infuse life with meaning and purpose, bringing pardon where there is injury, hope where there is despair, light where there is darkness.

A longtime friend
with Christine
Easwaran.



Our True Self

In the days when I was attending my village school, some of us boys – my cousins and I and a few of our schoolmates – would occasionally rob a nearby mango tree. Of course, we were always absolutely sure that nobody would find out. But I don't think the owner of the tree was quite in the dark either, and once, exasperated, he went to the extent of complaining to the headmaster of our school. The headmaster became terribly angry. He called all the boys in the class together and interrogated us.

“Raman, who robbed that tree?”

“I did, sir.”

“Shankaran?”

“I robbed it, sir.”

“Krishnan?”

“I did it, sir.”

One by one, each boy said he had stolen the mangoes. Our headmaster was quite sure who the real culprits were, but he couldn't get any evidence. Finally, at his wits' end, he told some of the better students, “You boys should at least give a few hints. Why do you all say you did it?”

We said, “We are protecting the honor of the school.” He had to agree with us, and so we managed to escape.

When I got home, however, my grandmother was waiting. Word gets about quickly in a village, and the first thing she asked me was, “Little Lamp, did you steal those mangoes?”

I kept quiet.

“Were you in the group?”

I still kept quiet.

“Even if none of you tells anybody else,” she said, “there was somebody who saw. Someone inside is watching everything, someone who never misses a thing.”

Waiting patiently to be found

In the depths of consciousness, beneath the surface of our egocentric personality, dwells the Lord, who is our true Self — ever wakeful, eternally alert. When we do something selfish, the little voice inside saying, “Shabby, shabby, shabby,” is the echo of the voice of the Self within. And when we feel warm inside because we have helped someone, that is the Self making us feel warm.

For the most part, however, we are too absorbed in personal pursuits to heed these internal cues. As a result, we are always at odds with our true Self. This is the cause of all the insecurity in our hearts. Somewhere deep down we know the person we want to be, but we are so conditioned to look for satisfaction outside ourselves that we ignore this Self, who is waiting so patiently to be found.



Visiting Ramagiri Ashram on a weeklong retreat.

A Reading List for Forgiveness

All three volumes of *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, especially volume 2, *Like a Thousand Suns*

Conquest of Mind: chapter 12 (Detachment)

Original Goodness: chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8
(Patience, Love, Mercy, and Peacemaking)

Love Never Fails: the section on St. Francis

Strength in the Storm: chapter 5
(Choose Kindness)

Gandhi the Man

God Makes the Rivers to Flow: all passages mentioned in this journal can be found in Easwaran's anthology

An Ongoing Balancing Act

I grew up in a difficult family setting and had spent years in twelve-step programs, trying to change my very sensitive nature. When I found Easwaran in 2011, I was in great need of ‘something more’ to change the way I was feeling toward a new, very challenging family situation. Our only child/son had moved to another state, married, and had a child right away, with twins following two years later. The family situation in which he found himself greatly impacted not only his health and well-being but that of ours as well.

I needed an education in healthy detachment; I wanted desperately to be of service to our son and his family. I didn’t really understand what was happening, until I started realizing what Easwaran was saying – that I needed to detach not from other people but from my own opinions, dreams, and judgments. Practicing true forgiveness became a major focus of my practice.

I wrote to the BMCM, asking for assistance. I received a list of recommended books and a set of meditation passages for cultivating forgiveness and for strengthening my sense of a radiant Self, both within myself and those around me.

I have now memorized all the passages and dedicate my early evening meditation session to forgiveness. I repeat and write mantrams for reducing my self will and increasing my ability to forgive and love others as they are. I try to watch Easwaran every day for his ongoing support, continue to attend retreats, participate in satsang, and strive diligently to weave the eight-point program throughout my day.

It’s an ongoing balancing act of deep striving to forgive myself and others, and to direct my energy toward loving others rather than reacting to them and to things I cannot control. All my relationships have been greatly enhanced by the detachment and forgiveness work I’ve learned through my journey with Easwaran, Christine, the BMCM and the eight-point program. My love and gratitude continues to grow toward all of you who participate on this transformative journey with me!

A member of our Affiliate Program

Learning to Forgive Ourselves

Guilt is not entirely negative, because to be able to know that one has been at fault shows there is judgment at work, that there is some part of the mind that knows right from wrong. But guilt becomes a very serious handicap and a terribly oppressive force when we keep thinking about it, very much at our own expense, resulting in loss of self-respect, loss of self-confidence, and the development of a generally negative image about ourselves. That is where guilt can be very destructive.

So I am going to suggest a number of steps for dealing with this kind of guilt complex. First, it is a very unfair complex, because when you think about a misdeed that you committed twenty years ago, and condemn yourself severely today, it is like changing the time context. If you want to be fair and helpful, put yourself back twenty years, so you now have more hair on your head, no wrinkles, no bags under the eyes, can run a long distance without panting, and come back and eat everything in sight.

In other words, physically you are able to see the absurdity of it. Emotionally, too, it is the same thing. It's most unfair to keep on criticizing yourself for what you did twenty years ago from the point of view of what you are today. When I say that I have committed many silly mistakes in life, and I don't have the slightest guilt complex, that's because today I can look very compassionately upon the fellow who made those mistakes. I can

understand his outlook, his point of view, the situation in which he was, the pressures to which he was subject, the inability to see clearly, and the reluctance to exercise adequate control over his senses. It's because I understand all this that I am able to be very compassionate with myself. And that's what I would ask every one of you, when you look back on your past, to be very understanding, very compassionate, and not to go on carrying this big burden of guilt.

A curious aspect of this guilt complex, when it becomes obsessive, is that it is another card up the ego's sleeve. I have met quite a few people during the last twenty years who really gloated in their guilt complex, and who would have felt terribly deprived if I had snatched away their burden and taken it to the dump. So, let's be very careful about this, because in a guilt complex you are dwelling upon yourself.

Second, whenever thoughts begin to turn to the past, there is always this possibility of developing a guilt complex and carrying it on your shoulders all through life. That's why in the great mystical tradition of all religions they say don't think about the past. There is no such thing as the past. When your thoughts go back to the past, to your university or college or high school or kindergarten days, bring it back to the present. That's where the repetition of the mantram can be very useful.

We have to stay alert right at the outset. Most people do not deliberately think about the past, but little associations — you see the same car the fellow owned with whom you used to go out in those days, for instance — just a few little touches like that, and you are already back in the olden

days. And that is due to lack of vigilance. That's where you can really repeat the mantram.

India is very dear to me, I have many dear relatives in India, but I don't let my thoughts go to India. I am able to keep my attention all the time here. You can all learn to do that with the help of the mantram. Whenever thoughts come up about the past, not only painful ones, but pleasant ones too, don't let your thoughts travel to the past.

Finally, if you have committed mistakes in the past, learn from them not to commit them again today. And absolutely not tomorrow. The Lord is merciful, he is loving, he knows that we need to commit some mistakes to learn. I don't ever

Working on an exercise during a weeklong retreat.



deprecate a person for committing mistakes. Where it bothers me is when I see that person continuing to make the same mistake over and over again. That is like being in the first grade all one's life. There is some satisfaction being in the first grade for one year. But, after four years, five years, ten years, when your knees are lifting the desk, and when your feet are dangling over the feet of the fellow in front, it's time to get out of that class and go to a higher one.

So if you were unkind to somebody yesterday, try to be a little kinder today. If you did your job poorly yesterday, pay more attention to it today. When you have committed a mistake, don't dwell upon it as a guilt situation, but use it as a learning situation.

When we look with some detachment at our own behavior at the end of the day, we may be tempted to write, "This won't do." I am not dissuading you from that. Write in the left-hand margin, "This won't do." But in the right-hand margin, write, "I'll do better tomorrow."

Then your mistakes have a purpose, and they don't take away from your confidence, your self-respect, and your self-improvement.

A Prayer From Shankara

Errors by my hand or foot, by my speech, or body,
By my ears, eyes, or thought;
Whether by what I've done or failed to do,
Dear Lord, forgive all these.
O ocean of mercy, God of gods,
Bestower of blissful peace, victory unto you!

Repeat the mantram and turn attention outwards.

I hurt someone badly in the past. Should I try to find them and ask for forgiveness?

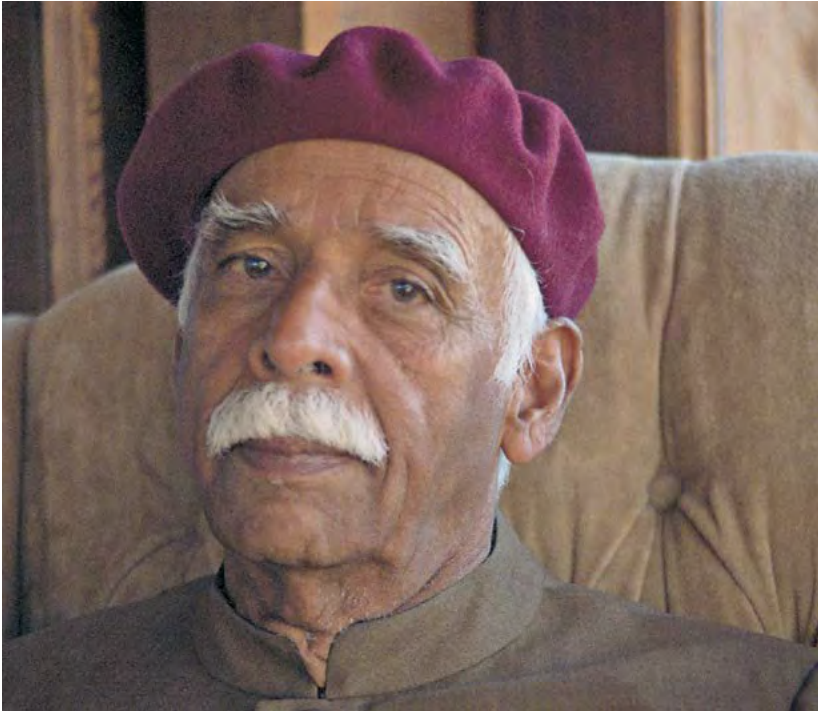
As our spiritual awareness deepens and we begin to see ourselves more clearly, there will be times when past mistakes will swim into our vision and do their best to consume us in guilt or regret. At such times, it is essential to repeat the mantram and turn all our attention outwards, away from ourselves. Analyzing our mistakes and dwelling on how to repay them is of no earthly benefit at all.

But here I can offer one consoling application of the law of karma. If, when you were in Milwaukee, you happened to say something insulting about your girlfriend's dog, it is not necessary to go to Milwaukee and find your old girlfriend or her dog to make amends. Every dog you treat with kindness will be a proxy for that dog.

If you have treated a particular person badly, even if you can no longer win that person's forgiveness, you can still win the forgiveness of yourself, of the Lord of Love within, by bearing with everyone who treats you badly and doing your best never to treat anyone else badly again. This is the tremendous practical implication of St. Francis's words, "It is in pardoning that we are pardoned." Whatever we have done, we can always make amends for it without ever looking backwards in guilt or sorrow.

One of the most consoling implications of this is that no matter what mistakes we may have committed in the past, no matter what liabilities we are oppressed by in the present, our real Self can never be tarnished; the core of our personality is always pure, always loving, always wise.

In both East and West, the mystics illustrate



this by drawing a comparison with the sun. Even when it is completely hidden by the clouds, even when we close our eyes to it, the sun is always blazing away with the same radiance. Similarly, even if we have done our best for many years to cover up the splendor of the Self, it is still there, as radiant as ever, in our heart of hearts. We don't have to make ourselves loving or patient or forgiving; we have only to remove from our superficial personality everything hostile, everything impatient, everything resentful. When all these coverings are removed, the beauty of the Self will shine forth unimpeded.

Easwaran, 1988.



Friends at a Ramagiri Ashram event.

Get Back In There and Try Again

“Guilt: a bad feeling caused by knowing or thinking that you have done something bad or wrong.” My father died almost three years ago, and I still think of him every day. These thoughts are tinged with regrets and guilt: shouldn’t I have spent more time with him in those last months, shouldn’t I have more decisively intervened to head off his slide into death, shouldn’t I have ...?

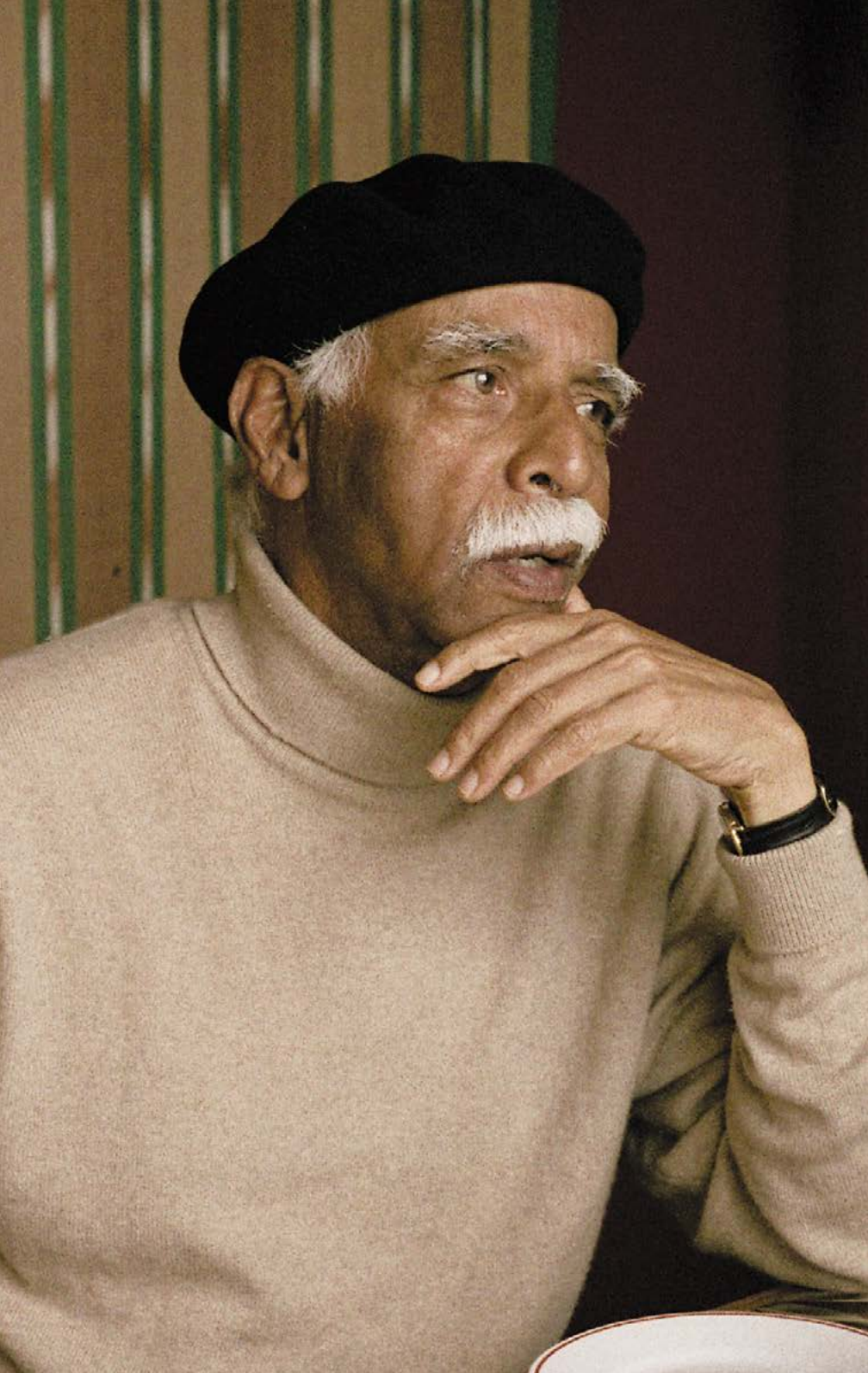
Easwaran has good advice for me. First, he says, I mustn’t be unfair on myself by judging myself from the perspective of what I know now. And I must learn to forgive myself, which Easwaran says I learn to do by forgiving others, by not judging them and criticizing their mistakes. What’s important is to learn from the past and not repeat my mistakes in the future: so, if someone near to me needs me then I should help them whole-heartedly and not be dividing my time between them and less important things that I’m busy with.

In particular, I can help other people who are going through similar experiences to those I went through, by supporting them with compassion and one-pointed attention, listening to them and helping them work through what they can really do and what they have to accept as being out of their hands. And meditation of course helps: “drive out negative thoughts with positive ones,” says the Buddha — how wise!

The prayer of St. Francis keeps me positive. Gandhi’s “The Path” tells me to get back in there and try again. “The Saint” affirms the “original goodness” that was in my father — and in me if I work at it. “Do Not Look With Fear” reminds me that suffering sometimes just has to be borne. Of course, meditating on any of the passages helps in one way or another.

I can’t do any more for my father, but I can try to use my experiences to support others better.

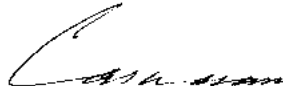
A BMCM staff member



An Ocean of Mercy

I can testify to you from my own life, without reservation, that whatever sins we have committed in life, we can receive forgiveness from God. But the condition is that we forgive all those against whom we have ill will or enmity.

That is why every day I repeat to my God, “You are the ocean of mercy. Please allow me to drown myself in your ocean.” It’s a very good prayer, and it will release people from the guilt complex and the burden of the past.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Easwaran". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'E'.

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Find inspiration and spiritual fellowship at a program that's right for you. Everyone is welcome!

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- **“Learn to Meditate” Webinar** (one hour, free)
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-

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New Extended Edition of *Passage Meditation*

Why a new edition?

After 1978, when the book was first published, Easwaran continued to answer questions on his eight-point program. We wanted to add some of these questions and answers to the original book. More than thirty percent of the material in this edition is new.

What has been changed?

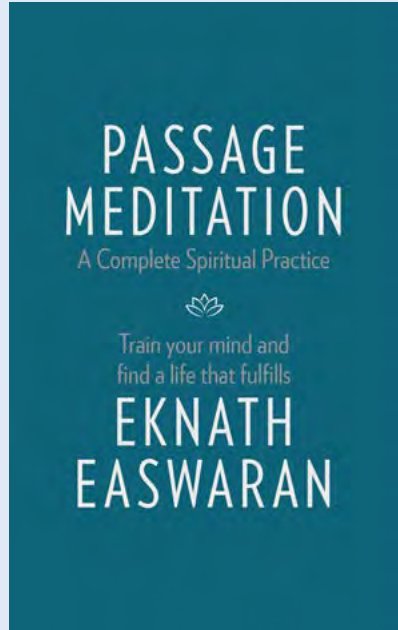
The biggest change is the addition of new Q&A sections, arranged by point. Some of this material has appeared in journals over the last few years, but now you can find it all together in Easwaran's flagship book. Our Young Adult team also helped us to choose a new cover.

When will the book be available?

September 13th – print book, ebook, and audiobook. If you want to order a copy before then, you can pre-order from Amazon. This will also encourage Amazon to promote the book more widely.

To close with Easwaran's words from the Preface:

“In India, meditation is called ‘the end of sorrow’ and ‘mastery of the art of living.’ It is my deepest prayer that through this book you will find these promises fulfilled in your own life.”





Jesus says, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” I caught the connection immediately: if I am able to forgive others for what they have done to me, I will find it very easy to forgive myself for the trouble I may have caused others.

So for those who find it very hard to forgive themselves, I would suggest that they learn to forgive others.

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