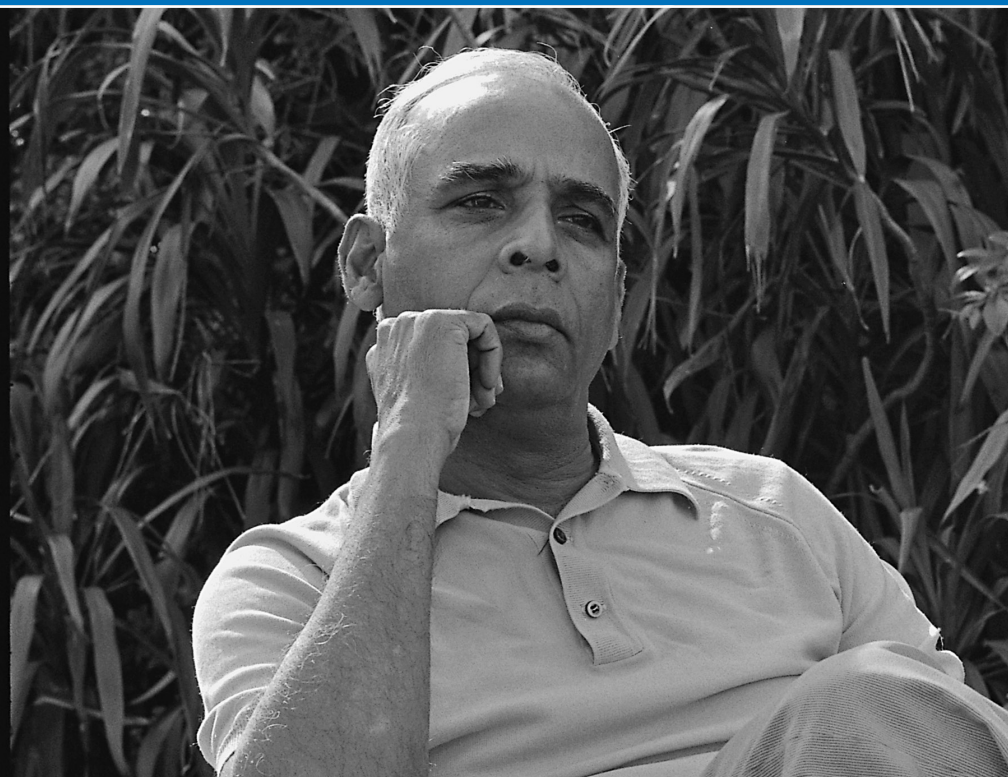


EKNATH EASWARAN'S

# Blue Mountain Journal

PASSAGE MEDITATION & SPIRITUAL LIVING



SPRING 2014

What's the *Point* of  
Slowing Down?

# Redefining Efficiency

By Christine Easwaran

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to carry on his work.*

The schedule was always tight, but Easwaran was never in a hurry. Not once, then or since, did I see him pressured into speeding up to get more done in the time available. By his example, he was constantly teaching what he knew from experience: the most effective way to accomplish a lot is to do one thing at a time and do it well.

The first time I remember Easwaran asking me to slow down was on a beautiful autumn afternoon in 1960. The freeway was new and broad and there was almost no traffic. I had no reason to hurry, but under these conditions it was natural – and fun – to go the speed limit. So it came as a surprise to me when he asked me to slow down – I wasn't exceeding the limit, after all. But I dropped back anyway.

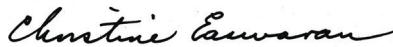
In those days, I simply couldn't understand why Easwaran placed so much importance on such matters. I thought it might be cultural. As an American, I took hurry for granted and considered it self-evident that speed means efficiency and faster is better. I soon learned that efficiency comes from complete concentration on one thing at a time, even when one has to manage several tasks. The secret is the unbroken flow of attention that characterizes peak performance.

The word *slow* is misleading when it implies sluggish. Easwaran was unhurried, but he was never sluggish. In an emergency he could act instantly, before those around him grasped what was happening. When planning was called for, however, he would often slow down like a gymnast poised before bursting into her routine. Then, suddenly, he would act, still without hurry but with intense precision, setting in motion one by one the things that needed to be done.

Helping others to slow down occupied Sri Easwaran's attention from the beginning of his career as a spiritual teacher until the end of his life. It was, he said, absolutely essential to learning to meditate. If that was evident to him in 1959, how much more important it must be today!

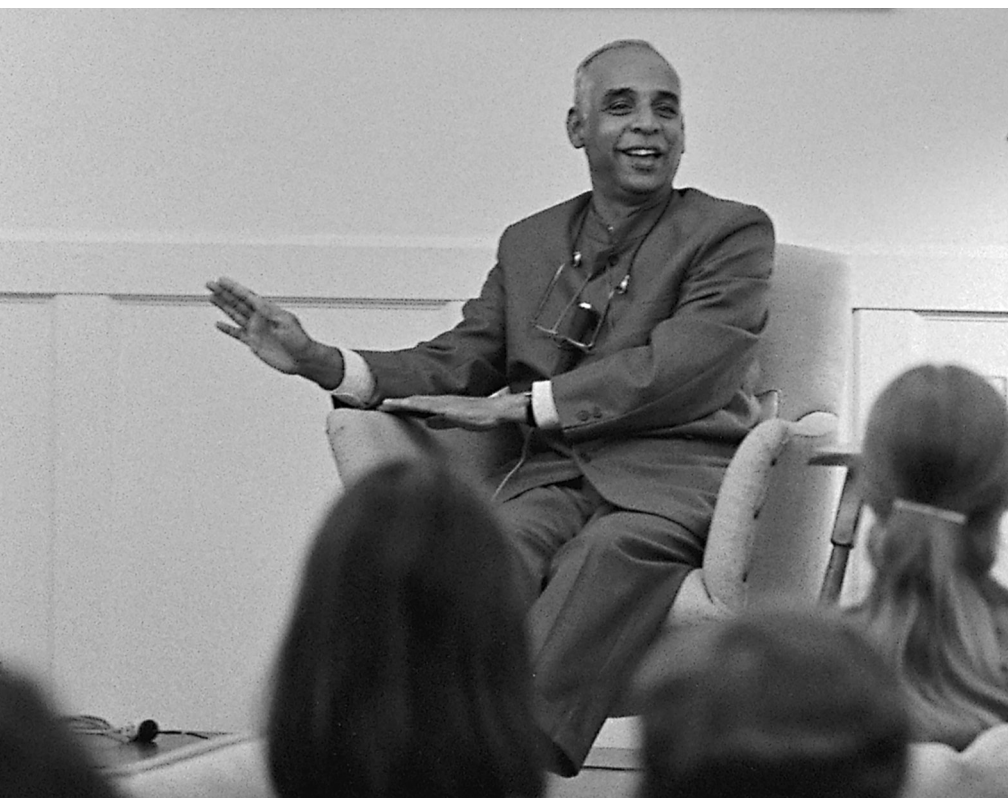
For those who want to go deeper into this topic, I recommend re-reading the relevant chapter in Easwaran's book *Passage Meditation* and the last book published during his lifetime, *Take Your Time*. We'll pick up the theme again in our next issue when we take a deeper look at a closely related point in his program, One-pointed Attention.

I might add a few comments on our new format. We have aimed at preserving the essentials you have come to expect – inspiration and guidance from Sri Easwaran plus practical illustrations of the eight-point program in action from readers like you – in a format that is beautiful and easy to read in both print and digital editions. If you have comments, we'd love to hear from you! Please write to [editor@easwaran.org](mailto:editor@easwaran.org) or to Blue Mountain, P.O. Box 256, Tomales, CA 94971. We expect to be refining the details of this design throughout 2014.



Christine Easwaran  
For the Board of Trustees

The word *slow* is misleading when it implies sluggish. Easwaran was unhurried, but he was never sluggish.



*Easwaran in a question  
and answer session with  
a small group of  
students in 1968.*

# What's the Point of Slowing Down?

*Frequently Asked Questions  
answered by Eknath Easwaran*

Quite honestly, I don't see the point of slowing down. Could you explain why you attach so much importance to it?

Even to see life, we need to go slow. To enjoy life, we need to go slow. To understand people, to understand situations, to arrive at considered conclusions and to make wise decisions – for all of these, we need time.

And this is just what is impossible in a speeded-up civilization; there is no time for anything. After a while we become habituated to going faster and faster, and speed gradually takes over the mind. A kind of compulsive pressure builds up.

Now we really have a problem, because it is very hard to change such a pattern of living. Just as an eye cannot observe its own working, so a rapid mind cannot take the time to perceive its own rapidity.

Speeded-up people become automatic, which means they have no freedom and no choices, only compulsions. Since they take no time to reflect on things, they gradually lose the capacity for reflection. Without reflection, how can we change? We first have to be able to sit back, examine ourselves with detachment, and search out our patterns of behavior. Paradoxically, people who hurry are actually stuck in the same spot.

We need time for pondering life's deeper questions instead of always making money or making things. We need time simply to be quiet now and then: time to reflect on what we are doing, what we value, how we are spending our lives.

So slowing down is not the goal; it is the means

Even to see life, we need to go slow.

Slowing down is not the goal; it is a means to an end. The goal is living in freedom.

The goal is living in freedom – freedom from the pressures of hurry, from the distractions that fragment our time and creativity and love. Ultimately, it means living at the deepest level of our awareness.

*But surely this means I won't get as much done?*

Of course, going slow doesn't mean achieving little. If your concentration is one-pointed, going slow means achieving much.

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.

Somehow, in our modern civilization, we have acquired the idea that the mind is working best when it runs at top speed. Yet a racing mind lacks time even to finish a thought, let alone to check on its quality.

When we slow down the mind, we work better at everything we do. Not only is the quality of our work better, we are actually able to get more done. A calm, smooth-running flow of thought saves a lot of wear and tear on the nervous system, which means we have more vitality and resilience in the face of stress.

*But I like excitement! Slowing down sounds a bit dull.*

When I talk about a slower pace of life, I don't mean an idle sail far from any stirring breeze, with no adventure beckoning us. If anything is less desirable than a speeded-up life, it is a life of boredom and indifference. When we slow down and train attention at the same time, we are naturally cultivating enthusiasm for every day. We begin to face each task with energy and focus.

This is a difficult balance to achieve – not hectic, not too casual – but it is a quality to be cultivated if we want to live at our best.

It may sound paradoxical, but however tight our schedule, however many things clamor to be done, we don't need to hurry. At work, as elsewhere, we need to cultivate discrimination so we can decide what is important and then proceed to do it at a moderate pace. If we can keep our mind calm and go about our business with undivided attention, we will not only accomplish more but we'll find ourselves more patient, more at peace.

So there's a deeper meaning to slowing down – it's not just about lifestyle?

I believe it was the historian and philosopher Will Durant who said that any person in a hurry is not civilized. This is not a superficial quip but a profound statement that calls into question the achievements of our technological society. Even though we have attained a level of material abundance that would astonish our ancestors, we seem to have less and less time for what really matters: strengthening the bonds of love that sustain a civilization.

To be civilized means having the time to make a lasting contribution to our families and our communities. We all need time to give freely of our resources, our skills, our capacities, ourselves. Most of all, we need time to reflect and to draw closer to the divine core of our being.

We are familiar with the concept of famine for food. But there is also famine for time. I don't think we are quite aware of the extent to which we are slowly starving.

Loving companionship with family members and friends, service to the wider world, periods of reflection on the timeless truths that sustain

We all need time to give freely of our resources, our skills, ourselves.

The more we  
fill up our days,  
the emptier we  
become  
inside.

life – these have been crowded out by a dizzying round of scheduled activities that confer little lasting benefit on anyone. The more we fill up our days running from home to job to health club to shopping mall to movie multiplex to fast-food restaurant, the emptier we become inside.

I would suspect that our sense of time-famine comes from a mind that is speeded up, too distracted to make wise choices between what brings only temporary satisfaction and what is of lasting value. When we complain that there is not enough time, what we really mean is that there is not enough time to do everything we want.

So we try to fit more and more into the same twenty-four-hour period by moving faster or by multitasking – that odd term used by efficiency experts to describe the practice of doing several things at the same time. What starts out as a set of physical habits gradually invades the nervous system.

Eventually, a speeded-up life creates a chronically speeded-up mind, and we become incapable of benefiting from the opportunities for leisure and reflection that might come our way. Doing more and more satisfies us less and less. We feel increasingly cut off from what is best in ourselves and from those we want to love.

During nearly forty years as a teacher of meditation in this country, I am glad to say that I have helped thousands of harried men and women slow down and start living richly textured, creative, selfless lives full of meaning and purpose.

Based on this long experience, I would venture to say that the mark of an educated person is the use of time which he or she makes. I think it should be possible to look at a person for a day and make a good guess at how civilized that person is.



## A Different Kind of Leadership

I am not the most vocal, loud, emphatic, or ambitious voice in our workplace. However, what I have found is that when I do speak, my voice is listened to and considered. People seek out my opinion because they know I have a calm and thoughtful approach that allows for all voices to be heard. A reputation for this type of leadership gives me a different kind of advantage that more demanding voices will never have.

I attribute this ability to my practice of slowing down. Believe me, I can't always achieve the goal, but it seems that simply maintaining sustained effort toward a slow mind helps.

A Journal Reader (unnamed)

### How does this fit into the rest of your eight-point program?

When I present the spiritual life, what I am presenting is life at its best – physically, mentally, intellectually, and of course spiritually. It is a total approach based on the practice of meditation, and supported by other allied disciplines which give us the opportunity of living a long, healthy, happy, productive life of selfless service.

Each point in my eight-point program of meditation is linked to all the rest. For example, if you slow down, it will help you in making your mind one-pointed, in getting some measure of control over your senses, and in being very supportive of those around you.

It is also good to remember that we need an artistic sense of balance in practicing these eight points. People who may be good at one thing may

not be so good at another, so they should pay special attention to the weak area. Everybody needs to work on special areas that are weak. To people who are given to voracious spiritual reading, for example, I wouldn't advise reading even more. They need to concentrate on other areas.

Everyone today needs to work hard at slowing down, because the pace of life has sped out of control.

In particular, I think everyone today needs to work hard at slowing down, because the pace of life has sped out of control. Every one of us can benefit by planning our day well and going through our tasks with concentration at a slow, even pace which does not put us under undue pressure.

Last, I want to say a few words about learning to slow down inside. This is the real crux of slowing down: beginning to slow down internally, in the mind. The more we slow down the thinking process, the more control we have over our lives.

That is why Meher Baba says a mind that is slow is sound. When your mind stops racing, it is naturally concentrated rather than distracted,

*Quiet reflection  
in Easwaran's  
memorial  
garden.*



naturally kind instead of rude, naturally loving instead of selfish. That is simply the dynamics of the mind.

It's really hard for me with my job and family to slow down. I have no idea where to start.

When I recommend to someone that they slow down, they often raise a legitimate question: "There is so much that I have to do; how can I go through it slowly and get it all done?"

I usually answer by referring to my own experience as a teacher in India. As chairman of the department of English at a large university, I had heavy responsibilities. I said at the time what people tell me today: I simply cannot go slowly and take care of all these vital matters.

Then I remembered my spiritual teacher, my grandmother, who had great responsibilities in our extended family of over a hundred people and in our village. She always fulfilled those responsibilities splendidly, and I recalled that she had an unerring sense of what was central and what was peripheral.

Finally I sat down and made a list of all the things I felt bound to do. Then I took my red pencil and, using her example, I crossed out everything that was not necessary or actually beneficial. There were some surprising results. When I surveyed what remained, I found I had freed a number of hours every week.

It is somewhat painful to do this, I admit. But very quickly you will find it liberating. One of the most important things about this kind of review is that it is an admission to yourself that you can't do everything. Once you make this realization, you can begin to ask, "What do I want to do? What is important?" When all is said and done, if you don't make this list for yourself, the pressures of

You can begin to ask, "What do I want to do? What is important?"

everyday life will simply make it for you.

To get a fresh perspective on activities you may be engaged in simply out of habit, or other reasons that masquerade as necessity, you may find it helpful to show your list to a detached friend. Another way to evaluate your activities is to ask yourself, "Will this help the next generation?"

Of course, this list reflects your priorities, no one else's. No one will be looking over your shoulder while you decide what gets the red pencil. And, of course, the list is not permanent. Every now and then I still repeat this exercise, making a list and questioning all my activities because priorities change.

[What do you see as our top priority?](#)

Put your morning meditation first.

For everyone, I would say that first and foremost on your priority list is the practice of meditation. It will clear your eyes and bring the detachment and discrimination we all need to make wise choices. So right at the top of your list should be the resolution to put your morning meditation first and never let anything come in its way. Don't do anything at the expense of your meditation, and don't fail to do anything that will benefit your meditation.

When I started meditating, just like every beginning meditator, by the end of an arduous day I would have used up most of the power that had been released in my morning meditation. But for some time, it never occurred to me that I could meditate again in the evening. I had a very full work load, and often, even when the day was over, I would go back to campus again after dinner to attend faculty meetings or other college functions and try to make a contribution there. So naturally, when I did have a little time to myself in the evening, I liked to relax: read some of my favorite authors, listen to classical music or the All India

news, attend a play or lecture.

Then I began to realize that there was more I could do about my meditation, and immediately my priorities underwent a change. To begin with, I told All India Radio it would have to miss me, and I began to meditate regularly every evening too. I didn't understand it at first, but I was beginning to make my day whole, which meant that I was making my consciousness whole as well. Now instead of a sometimes slender thread connecting one morning's meditation with the next, there was a thread connecting morning and evening – and then a new thread connecting evening with the following morning. I could see the benefit almost immediately – not only in my morning meditation, but in the quality of my life during the day. After that, even if a favorite play came to campus, unless there was a matinee I would just tell my friends, "I'm sorry, I have some other engagement."

That gave me the key: put meditation first. Make it the first priority; everything else can be second. Nothing important will ever suffer by this.

I began to meditate regularly every evening too. I could see the benefit almost immediately.



*Meditating together at a Young Adult retreat.*

## "I Was Always Doing Something"

When it comes to time management, I am one of the best that I know. I am the reigning champion of *rajas* (a Sanskrit word describing high energy)! One of the things that I realized once I started to meditate daily, however, was how being a taskmaster made my mind wander off to some next future step in a personal or work project. This even happened during meditation.

Plus, I was always doing something. Always doing something meant that I had little time. Having little time led to rushing through tasks to get everything on my growing to-do list done. Which started to lead to stress. I decided to focus on Easwaran's point of slowing down, and having more single-pointed focus. I wanted to get rid of some things that I didn't need to be doing so I could focus more, for longer periods, and take my time with what I wanted to do.

What I've learned is that slowing down is an art. It has also been quite a fun, challenging, and joyful experience. While I would say that I'm still mastering the art of slowing down, there are a number of practices that I've learned from Easwaran that can help us learn how to slow down and really enjoy everything that we're doing – including the chores that don't normally seem very exciting.

I learned from Easwaran's stories about how he began to "red-line" events and meetings in his life that were no longer of highest importance. I began to make clear priorities in the things that I wanted to do more of, and things that I wanted to do less of. I don't make New Year's resolutions – I make "more and less" lists. I've done this for the last five or so years.

Correctly setting my priorities has been at the core of slowing down for me. I spend much less time doing unnecessary chores, which allows me to spend more time doing the things that I want to focus on doing more: spending time with friends and my partner, studying and teaching yoga, meditating, and focusing on being creative.

A Journal Reader (Jeremy Stanifer)

# Slowing Down for What Matters Most

*By Eknath Easwaran*

To paraphrase the Buddha, we learn to slow down by trying to slow down. The suggestions that follow are not quick fixes. They are skills and grow through practice. Even today, after decades, I am still fine-tuning the ways in which I spend my time each day – finding new adjustments I can make to give me a little more time for what matters to me most.

## Get up early

One practical step is to get up early in the morning. If you don't do that, how will it be possible for you to avoid hurry? Rise early so you can set a relaxed pace for the day.

Have your meditation at a fixed time, so that it will almost become a reflex.

If at all possible, have a leisurely breakfast with family or friends before going off to work or school. If you live alone, it is still helpful to sit down with a nourishing breakfast – don't eat it standing up! – and enjoy it without hurry. All these things set the pace you will be following for the rest of the day.

When you leave for work, for errands, for a trip, slow down and spend a few moments checking through things mentally to make sure you are taking everything you need.

Get to work a little early – in time to get to your desk without crashing through the office, in time to speak to the janitor and your co-workers, in time for a few minutes of reflection while you arrange the priorities that face you at work. These are simple steps, but they can go a long way in slowing

down the pace of life, not only for you but for those around you as well.

### Work on the essentials

Decide what is important and then do it at a moderate pace.

The desire to fit more and more into a given span of time is pervasive, and technology has merely added to the pressure. Many people strive to squeeze in as many tasks as they conceivably can. Instead of concentrating on the essentials and doing what is required in a slow, thorough way, they hunt for the nonessentials and work on them first.

By postponing, you set the stage for a drama of crisis at a later date. When you can evade things no longer, you rush about frantically with your adrenalin pouring – body under stress, mind scattered – and barely squeeze by with a second-rate job. Or perhaps you miss the deadline altogether and have to accept penalties.

At work, as elsewhere, we need to cultivate discrimination so we can decide what is important and then proceed to do it at a moderate pace. Work on the essentials at a steady rate, not pushed by the clock or competition. With some reflection, it is possible to avoid a great many situations where we know we are going to be pressured to speed up.

If we look at our home life and our work, we may see that a surprising number of these situations form recurrent patterns and can be forestalled – often by the simple expedient of not waiting until the last minute to do something that needs to be done. If we cannot avoid these circumstances, it helps to be forewarned.

### Resist being hurried

Jobs do vary widely, of course. But I have been told by an emergency medical technician doing ambulance work that it is possible to resist being



hurried even in the midst of frantic circumstances. In fact, this friend told me, that is just when he needs to keep his mind cool, concentrated, and clear. In such situations, the hands and brain of a paramedic or nurse or firefighter have been highly trained. They know what to do, and they carry out their duties swiftly. A speeded-up mind only gets in the way.

### Slowing Down: The Most Important Preparation

Just before potentially difficult meetings, after all the strategizing and goal setting and preparation that I could possibly do to plan for the meeting, I make a point to slow down my mind. I view this as the most important preparation I can do.

A mantram walk is my favorite mode, either inside the building or out and around the building a couple of turns. After that, I have a mind that can handle whatever comes its way in a calm and thoughtful manner.

A Journal Reader (unnamed)

### The mantram helps

The mantram is also particularly helpful in the case of hurry, because it gives the restless mind something to fasten on and gradually slows it down. An excellent way to take a short, refreshing break from work, the mantram is also an aid in training yourself to drop your work at will. When you begin to feel yourself rushed, just stop a minute, repeat your mantram, and then be deliberately slow in whatever you are doing.

When you begin to feel rushed, stop, repeat your mantram, and then be deliberately slow in whatever you are doing.

## Be patient

Good spiritual manners require you to say, “Take your time. I’m in no hurry.”

During the day – not only at work, but in the post office, restaurant, or bank – you can also combat the fast pace of others. Good spiritual manners require that you say to people who help you, “Take your time. I’m in no hurry.”

The patience we show at work, on errands, and at home is our insurance against all the distressing ailments brought about by hurry. Patience means good digestion; impatience means poor digestion, perhaps an ulcer. When we are patient, all the vital processes work smoothly. In the present context, patience means not hurrying when dealing with others and giving them as much of our time as they can profit from.

## Preparing to go home

At the end of the workday, you might try to bring things to a close a little early so that you have time to clear off your bench or desk, put away tools or papers, and organize your materials for the following day. Put things in order when you leave your job, and learn to detach yourself from your work at will.

## A slowed-down evening

At home, after returning from a day at work, most of us like to have an evening of recreation with family and friends. To enjoy such recreation, though, you need detachment from your work – the ability to drop it mentally at will. If you have been rushing all day, you will be so entangled and tense that you will not be able to let it go. While circumstances may require you to bring work home from time to time, it is something else again to leave the work there and bring the thought of it home, fretting over what has already happened and what may happen on the following day.

Think of a job as a kind of wearing apparel. You walk in, slip into your occupational coat as, say, a librarian, well driller, city planner, or printer, and for eight hours you give yourself wholly to your job. But at the end of the day, you take off this coat and hang it on a hook; you don't stuff a sleeve into your back pocket or purse and drag the rest on the ground behind you all evening long and throughout the weekend.

Working with concentration and then being able to drop your work at will is a skill that can be developed with practice. If you do not learn this kind of detachment, you will be burdened by work as Sinbad the Sailor was by the Old Man of the Sea, who straddled his neck, squeezing him with bony legs.

When you come home from a workday without hurry, once again to join your family and friends, you will be able to give freely of yourself. You may find as you walk in the door that some distressing situations have developed, especially if you have children. But you will have sufficient patience to ease these domestic difficulties even though you have put in a full day's work.

Working with concentration and then dropping your work at will is a skill.

## For those who stay in the home

I have been speaking of the person who leaves home for a day's work, but much of it applies equally to those who remain. There is the same need to set a leisurely pace and use discrimination in the performance of tasks, the same need to organize work and be able to drop it at will, the same need to be patient and considerate towards those around us, whether it be those who stay home with us, such as children and older folks, or those who return home, perhaps care-laden, from their day's activities.

In my native state of Kerala we have a beautiful tradition: every twilight the woman of the house

lights a lamp, usually a brass one with the wick floating in coconut oil, and moves from one member of the family to another, displaying for all this symbol of their unity.

Let us be relaxed and responsive to everyone.

In the evening, when you have been reunited with those close to you, rushing and tension are completely out of place. Let us be relaxed and responsive to everyone. If the children want your attention, listen cheerfully, not with half a mind but fully; you will find it vivifying to see the world, your world, through a child's eyes.

### Preparing for a good night's sleep

The thread of meditation running through your day can be extended into the evening too. Have your evening meditation reasonably early so that you have time for half an hour or so of spiritual reading before you go to sleep.

And choose your reading carefully. It should be positive, strengthening, and inspiring, and it should be more than just good literature or philosophy; it should be a piece of scripture which you respond to deeply, or writing stamped with the personal experience of a great mystic. Read a little, slowly and reflectively, giving the words a chance to sink deep into your consciousness. Then put the book aside, turn out the light, and fall asleep repeating your mantram.

If you have been kind throughout the day, turning your back when necessary on personal likes and dislikes, and then have given your best in meditation and fallen asleep in the mantram, you will go forward even while you sleep. Even in sleep we can be shaping our lives! In this way, with meditation and daily living supporting each other, your spiritual growth will be swift and sure.

# Slow Down Your Mind: An Experiment

*By Eknath Easwaran*

A hurried pace originates in the mind. You might stop at someone's desk to be sociable, but that doesn't mean your thoughts have stopped. If you're pretending to chat while your mind has sprinted ahead toward the conference room, you might as well take the rest of you there too.

No one can love with a mind that is going fast – or one that is divided. No one can love with a mind that is apt to swerve wildly, whether to avoid the small exigencies of daily life or to pursue something bright across the room that attracts you.

Let me suggest a small experiment. With the uncritical eye of the motion picture camera, observe your thought processes when you are in different states of mind. When you are feeling irritable, take a peek. If you have occasion to be afraid or anxious, check again. If a strong desire overtakes you and you can manage to see what's going on in the mind, take note. Check your vital signs at the same time: see how rapid your pulse is, and whether your breathing is shallow and quick, or deep and slow.

If you can do this accurately – which is harder than it sounds – you will make a very interesting discovery. Fear, anger, selfish desire, envy: all these are associated with a speeded-up mind, and when the mind speeds up, it takes basic physiological processes with it. The thinking process hurtles along, thoughts stumble over one another in an incoherent rush – and, on cue, the heart begins to race and breathing becomes quicker, shallow, and ragged.

Interestingly enough, the reverse is also true. Once the mind gets conditioned to speed, not only do speeding thoughts make the body go

faster, speeded-up behavior can induce negative emotions as well.

Speeded-up behavior can induce negative emotions as well.

Suppose you've slept through the alarm and are in a rush to get off to work. You rip through the kitchen like a whirlwind, grabbing whatever you need as you go, trying to button your shirt while you eat your toast on your way out the door. The next time you catch yourself like this, watch and see how prone your mind is to negative responses. Everything seems an obstruction or a threat. Your children look hostile – if you see them at all – and even the dog seems out to ruin your day, draping herself right across the threshold in the hope of tripping you up. “Watch out!” the kids say once you're gone. “It's going to be another of those mean-mood days.”

A speeding mind is a dangerous thing. When thoughts are going terribly fast, they are out of control, and there is no space between them. To press the analogy further, it's like those dangerous moments on the freeway when cars are not only speeding but following bumper to bumper. Everyone is in danger.

A thrilling realization comes when you begin to understand this two-way relationship between speeded-up thinking and negative emotions. If you are chronically angry, fearful, or greedy, you know well how much damage these tendencies have done to your relationships, making you “weak in love and imperfect in virtue.” And you know, too, how dauntingly hard they are to change when you approach them head-on. Their roots go deep in your past conditioning. You can talk them out, analyze them in your dreams, reason with yourself, go to anger workshops and fear seminars; still they wreak havoc, out of control.

But suppose that instead of going after chronic anger or fear directly you were to tackle the thought

## Slowing Down When You're Dead Tired

Slowing down is much needed in the holidays. We think that we are going to have time off and just relax and be with friends and family. Instead we find ourselves rushing from event to event, drowning in preparation of family meals, and trying to beat everyone else in the post-holiday sales.

The best example for me in slowing down is today. I'm dead tired after a massive argument with my teenager that tore a piece out of my soul. Yet I have managed to be a kind and loving father the whole day thanks to really slowing down.

Doing the laundry, slowly. Preparing lunch (okay, just heating leftovers) slowly. The best part of slowing down is that you have time to catch yourself if you start to get agitated or irritated. You have time to pick up the magic wand of repeating your mantram.

A Journal Reader (unnamed)

process itself – the mind in its Indianapolis speedway mode. When a car is going a hundred miles per hour, you can't safely slam on the brakes. But you can lift your foot off the accelerator. From one hundred miles per hour the speed drops to ninety-eight, then to ninety-five, then ninety, until finally you're cruising along at a safe and sane fifty-five. You've decelerated gradually and safely.

This is exactly what happens to the mind in meditation. You put your car into the slow lane – the inspirational passage – and you stay there, going through the words of the passage as slowly as you can. Distractions will try to crowd in, and you don't want to leave big gaps for them to rush into. For the most part, though, you just increase your concentration. In this way, little by little, you can gain complete mastery over the thinking process.

Instead of going after chronic anger or fear directly, tackle the thought process itself.



## Read Slowly, and Reflect

*Ek Nath Easwaran*

When I began to teach English literature, it was natural for me to pass on to my students the reflective habits I had acquired early in life. "Take your time over a book," I always told them. "If you want to get the full benefit of a good book, you have to read slowly. When you come to a paragraph that makes you stop and think, put the book down and reflect on what the author is trying to convey."

Now, as a teacher of meditation, I ask my readers to take plenty of time going through my books. Read a paragraph, reflect on it, and test it in your experience. Come back and read it again. As your meditation deepens, your thinking process slows down, and your understanding grows, you will find new meaning and fresh insights that you can draw upon to make a small but lasting contribution towards creating a civilization worthy of the name.



# “Tell Us Everything”

*By Eknath Easwaran*

It has been a sad observation for me over the past forty years to see that we seem to be passing on to our children our inability to slow down, reflect, and make the wise choices that enrich our own lives and the lives of those around us.

Every child needs the companionship of mom and dad. But mom and dad have to slow down in order to go at the child's pace. When I go to a shopping center, I often see little children being dragged from place to place crying their heads off while their parents get more and more impatient and agitated. They are in a hurry, for reasons which to them are clear and legitimate. But the children don't understand, and crying is the only language that small children know. They can't express themselves any differently. It is up to us to take time to understand their needs.

Children, as most sensitive parents know, cannot reasonably be kept to a schedule. Schedules are fine at the office, but young children have a sense of time that is very different – and much more natural. They don't know about appointments and parking meters and living in the fast lane, and we cannot make them understand; all we can do is hurry them along. It is we adults who must learn to slow down enough to enter their world, not their job to speed up and join ours.

I am not in favor of shunting children from activity to activity, which robs them of their innocence. I see with my own eyes how children are rushed from karate to soccer to gymnastics to ballroom dancing. As beneficial as this training might seem, we need to ask ourselves what is lost when the fleeting years of childhood offer so little chance for looking at the sky, watching the plants

We seem to be passing on to our children our inability to slow down.

and the animals, examining leaves floating in puddles or ants parading along a twig.

### “You tell the story”

When I was a boy, growing up in a beautiful village in Kerala state, South India, my grandmother used to tell me, “Go sit on the veranda, look at the sky, and watch the clouds. Then come back and tell me what stories you see there.”

My grandmother and mother never tried to hurry me.

I would spend long hours observing the ever-varying shapes of the towering monsoon clouds. When I went to my granny, she would say simply, “I am not going to talk. You talk; you tell the story.” I would tell her the tales I had found in the sky. All this developed my imagination at its deepest levels and stirred an awareness of the unity of life.

On school day afternoons, my grandmother and my mother were always there to greet me when I came running home. “Tell us everything that has happened since you left this morning,” they would insist. My rambling accounts of classmates and teachers, geography lessons and soccer games, seemed to enthrall them, and they never tried to hurry me by saying, “Please stick to the point.” In the evenings, my grandmother would sit by my side while I did my homework, even though she could neither read nor write, just to be with me and lend her support.

### The basis of my method of meditation

Later on, in high school, I became a great lover of poetry, thanks to my good teachers – three of whom were my uncles. I started memorizing poem after poem under their guidance, and the habit stayed with me when I went on to college. One of my great joys in the evening was to go for a walk, sit on the bank of a river, and recite

softly to myself the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (“The Bird of Time has but a little way to fly – and lo! the Bird is on the Wing”) or some of the sonnets of Shakespeare (“Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks within his bending sickle’s compass come”).

I could do this for hours on end. Today, it would be considered a waste of time. Yet this youthful pastime of memorizing words of great beauty and meaning was one of the factors that led me to develop the method of meditating on a spiritual passage which forms the basis of my eight-point program.

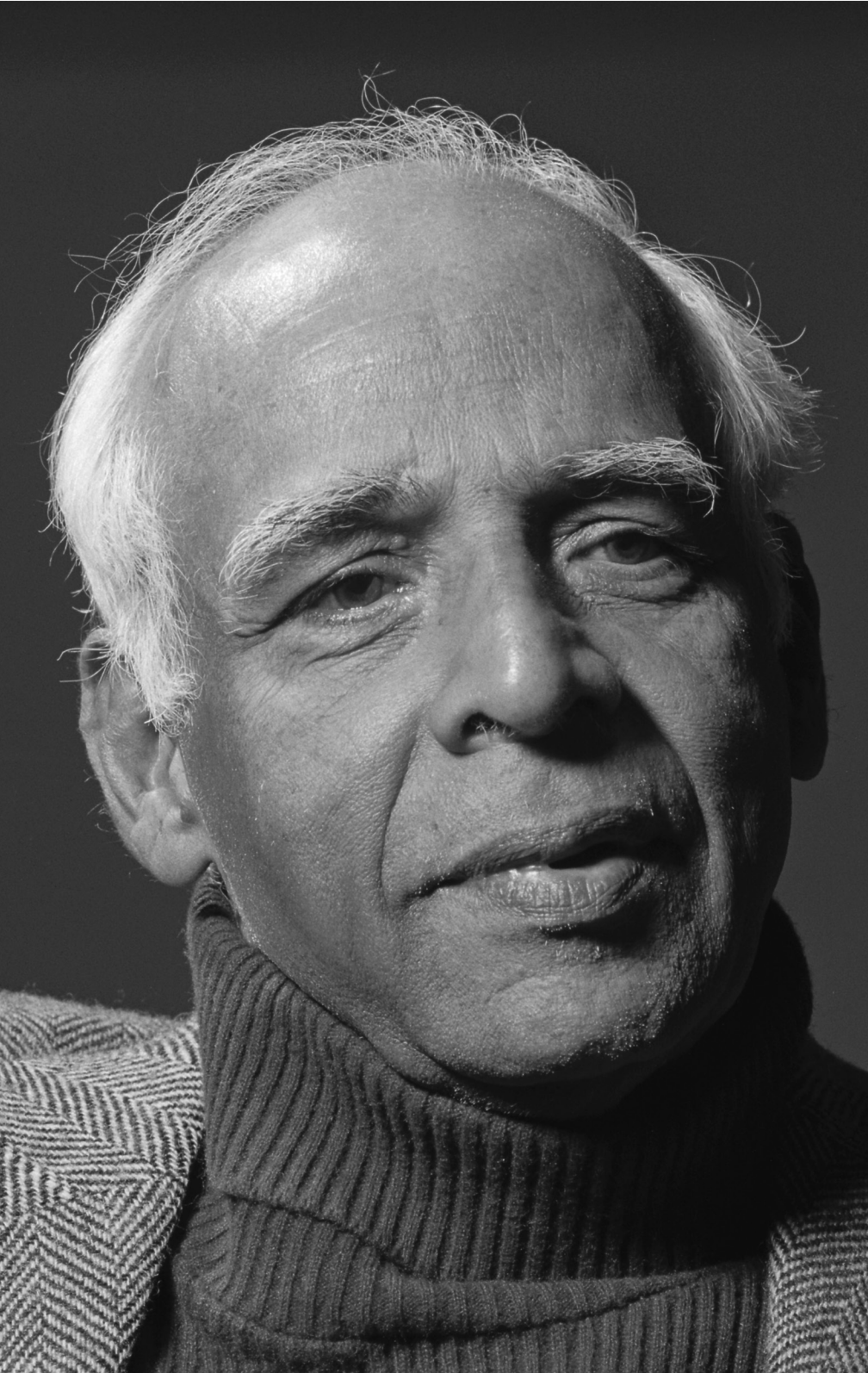
### “Set It for When We Can Play”

One day this week I powered through writing an overdue article at home. My son wanted to play and after being turned away a few times came to me with a timer. “Set it for when we can play.”

When it went off I wasn’t quite ready but knew I owed him my attention. We sat down to build a Lego lumber truck. My heart and mind were racing from the stress. I knew I had to slow my mind down. I prepped each block for him as he built the toy and started saying my mantram with each block. We built the truck bed, then the cab, then the trees. An hour passed and the toy was finished.

My heart and mind felt just as fresh as they do after my morning meditation. I love watching him play with the fruit of our shared effort.

A Journal Reader (Sarah Miller)



## Time to Wake Up

*Ek Nath Easwaran*

I was busy, but there was an emptiness in my heart that no success could fill. Something essential was slipping through my fingers. Meaning, perhaps. A sense of purpose, a reason for living. Certainly peace of mind. I recalled a line from Thoreau: "It's not enough to be busy. The question is, what are you busy about?" A good question. What did I want? I had been too busy even to ask.

In high school, I had read a story by H. G. Wells about a child who wanders down an unfamiliar street and spots a door in a plain white masonry wall. He opens it and discovers a garden where everything is welcoming and full of peace – a place where he belongs. The next day he tries to go back, but the door has disappeared.

Three or four times after that, as he grows into manhood and climbs the ladder of success, he turns a corner and happens to see the door again, just as he remembers it. He hesitates, but always he has something urgent to attend to and lets the moment go. The years pass and he attains fame and fortune, but he is haunted by regret that he never ventured through his door again.

When I read that story again in the middle of my life, I realized it applied to me. One detail that hadn't meant much when I was younger jumped out at me: every time that fellow sees his door in the wall again and decides to pass it by, he first looks at his watch. He can't take the time to stop to discover what he has always longed for.

In fact, the Buddha says, our constant hurrying is often a kind of anesthesia. It's not convenient to stop to ask big questions; it can even feel threatening. So long as we keep moving, we can put it off.

"Wake up!" the Buddha says. "It is time to wake up. Why do you go on sleeping?" I was almost forty; my alarm was ringing. It was time to step back, take a long view of my life, and reevaluate my priorities. What did I really want? What was life for?

# Silence

I weave a silence onto my lips.  
I weave a silence into my mind.  
I weave a silence within my heart.  
I close my ears to distractions.  
I close my eyes to attractions.  
I close my heart to temptations.  
Calm me, O Lord, as you stilled the storm.  
Still me, O Lord; keep me from harm.  
Let all tumult within me cease.  
Enfold me, Lord, in your peace.

*A Gaelic Prayer*

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## The Point of Slowing Down

“Even to see life, we need to go slow. To enjoy life we need to go slow. To observe events, to understand people, to make wise decisions – for all of these, we need time.”

– Eknath Easwaran