



Blue Mountain

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

EKNATH
EASWARAN

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

The Mystery of the Mantram

By Eknath Easwaran

THE MANTRAM becomes one's staff of life," declares Mahatma Gandhi, "and carries one through every ordeal. It is repeated not for the sake of repetition, but for the sake of purification, as an aid to effort, for direct guidance from above. It is no empty repetition. For each repetition has a new meaning, carrying you nearer and nearer to God."

The mantram I have received from my grandmother, with the imprint of her own intense spiritual awareness, is one of the most powerful and one of the most popular in all India:

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

This mantram consists of three holy names: *Hare* (the vocative form of *Hari*, pronounced as *Haray*), *Rama*, and *Krishna*.

When I was a child, sleeping on the verandah of our ancestral home in Kerala State in South India, I used to wake up every morning to the chanting of *Hare Rama* by my grandmother as she swept the courtyard with her coconut-fiber broom. Through her benediction it must have sunk deep into my heart, from where it rose to my rescue many years later under the storm and stress of life.

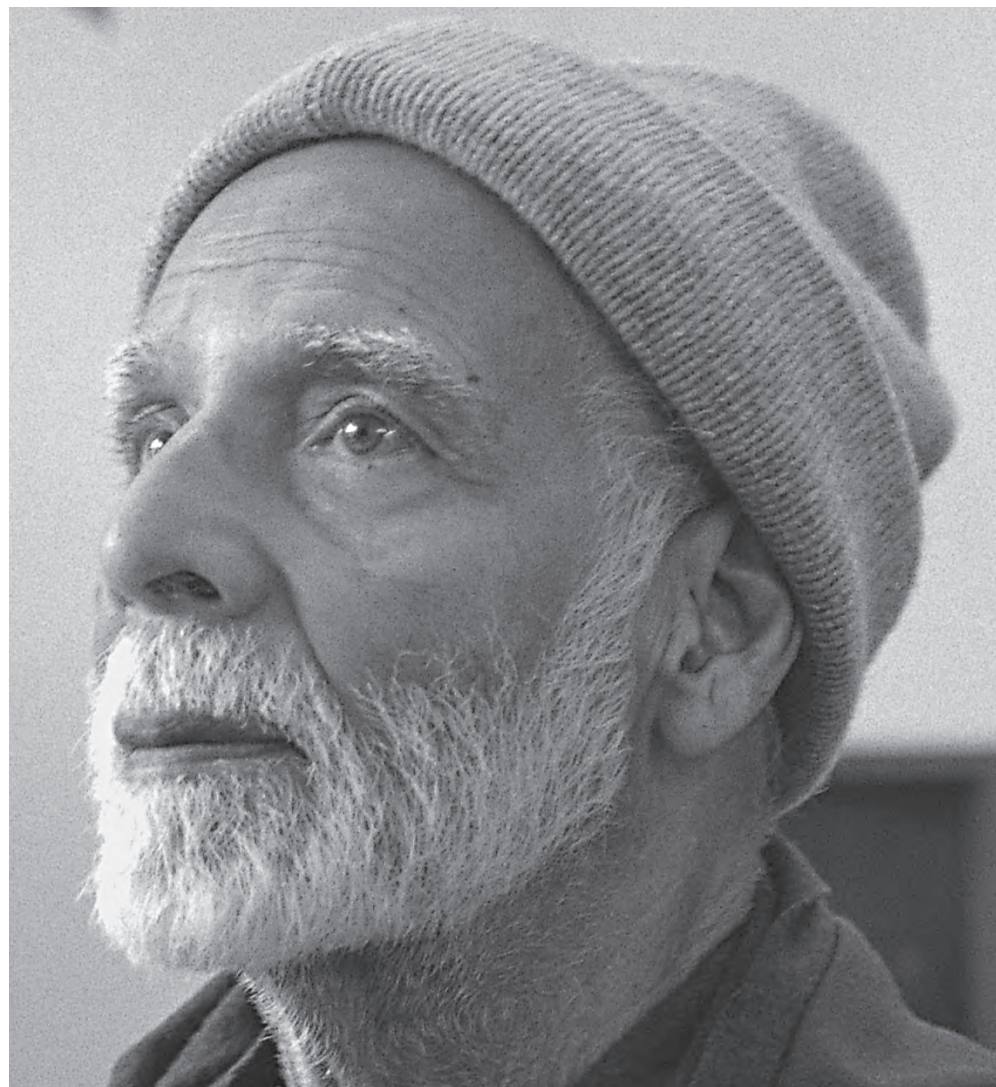
What exactly is a mantram? In order to answer this question it is necessary to refer briefly to the theory of vibration on which

the illumined sages say it is based. According to this theory, from the Great Silence there issued the Creative Word. "In the beginning was Brahman, with whom was the Word; and the Word was truly the supreme Brahman." This significant verse from the Rig Veda has an almost exact parallel in the Gospel According to St. John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

According to this theory, *shabda* or sound is the subtle stuff out of which the phenomenal world has emanated, and every object in it may, therefore, be looked upon as sound of a particular concentration. In other words, this

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From our archives: Eknath Easwaran, 1991.



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The Blue Mountain Center of Meditation

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

Passage Meditation: An Eight-Point Program

1. MEDITATION ON A PASSAGE

Silent repetition in the mind of memorized inspirational passages from the world's great religions. Practiced for half an hour each morning.

2. REPETITION OF A MANTRAM

Silent repetition in the mind of a holy name or hallowed phrase from one of the world's great religions. Practiced whenever possible throughout the day or night.

3. SLOWING DOWN

Setting priorities and reducing the stress and friction caused by hurry.

4. ONE-POINTED ATTENTION

Giving full concentration to the matter at hand.

5. TRAINING THE SENSES

Overcoming conditioned habits and learning to enjoy what is beneficial.

6. PUTTING OTHERS FIRST

Gaining freedom from selfishness and separateness; finding joy in helping others.

7. SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP

Spending time regularly with other passage meditators for mutual inspiration and support.

8. SPIRITUAL READING

Drawing inspiration from writings by and about the world's great spiritual figures and from the scriptures of all religions.

Eknath Easwaran

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

The Blue Mountain Center depends on donations to carry on its work. Every gift, large or small, is much appreciated and put to good use. The Center is a 501(c)(3) California nonprofit corporation; contributions are deductible from state and federal income tax.

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Taking the Mantram Deeper



Christine Easwaran

WE ARE continuing the discussion of the power of the mantram begun in our last issue.

Like meditation, the mantram has two faces. We use it to steady the mind through life's ups and downs, but we should never forget its ultimate purpose: to realize the unity of life. In this issue, Sri Easwaran tries to explain how the power of the mantram to keep us calm and kind during the day arises from the capacity to unify consciousness at the deepest possible level.

Our lead article is taken from one of Easwaran's earliest testaments to the power of the mantram, written – or, rather, dictated – in 1966, just months after our return to the US from India. The presentation is more formal than we are used to from his books. He is still a professor, choosing his words like the man who was so well known around India for his talks on All-India Radio. But he speaks with the authority of a spiritual teacher. It is fascinating to see how even in these early years he goes straight to the mystical heart of the mantram, the mystery of its power, which is attested to by mystics in all the world's great religions.

Easwaran and the mantram

Today it is natural to wonder if the mantram always played this central role in his spiritual life. He has told us how, as a child, he learned from his

grandmother how to steady his mind when he was anxious or afraid, but it seems to have assumed its place in his eight-point program only after he plunged into meditation. Those with a devotional bent, he explained, are attracted naturally to the mantram; others are drawn to meditation. In that latter category he included himself, and I suspect most of his students share a similar preference.

Nonetheless, he seems to have discovered the spiritual power of the mantram very soon after taking to meditation, and he was giving us detailed instructions in its use long before he had systematized his eight-point program.

Ajapajapam

Even in those early years, Easwaran held out for us the elusive promise of *ajapajapam*: the mantram repeating itself in the very depths of consciousness. He urged us to repeat it “at every possible opportunity” and to learn to fall asleep in it so that it could go on working while we slept.

That advice took on new significance for me when I joined Easwaran on the Blue Mountain in South India in 1962. At that time, you may remember, he had been called back to India by the terms of the Fulbright exchange program but had renounced his university position to devote himself to the work of our infant Blue Mountain Center. It took almost four years for the university to accept his resignation and for Easwaran to acquire the visas needed to return to the US – four years in which both of us were, to put it euphemistically, “between jobs,” with hours and hours to devote to spiritual disciplines. It was, as he says, an eight-hour day: meditation every morning, meditation every evening, and miles upon miles of walking with the mantram in between – not to mention the time spent in repeating the mantram during sleepless hours at night. Easwaran alludes to that period in the Questions and Answers in this issue (p. 8). I men-

tion it here as a reminder that when he says to repeat the mantram “at every possible opportunity,” he means much, much more than half an hour or so on a morning's walk.

Does that mean the mantram won't work unless we repeat it for hours as he did? Fortunately – for who has that kind of time today? – the answer is no. Easwaran often repeated the promise of the Bhagavad Gita that even a little of this discipline has great powers of protection, and most of his students, I suspect, have experienced a taste of this themselves, as the stories on page 6 illustrate. But if we want to rely on that power, if we want it to be there for us always, we do need to put in the extra effort he describes.

A new look for this journal

In those early days, with our limited resources, we brought Sri Easwaran's words to faraway students with a simple mimeographed newsletter. One of the first things we did on our return to the Bay Area was to transform those typewritten sheets into a significant little journal, *The Little Lamp*. The capacity to publish Easwaran's books dates from the day the first issue of *The Little Lamp* rolled off an ancient press in our notoriously leaky garage.

With the next issue, Spring 2014, we're redesigning again. The *Blue Mountain* journal will have a smaller format like that of *The Little Lamp*: easier to read and to carry, and designed to improve readability on electronic devices as well as print. Yes, the printed edition will still be available! And the content will remain the same: vital inspiration and instruction from Sri Easwaran plus helpful illustrations from you, our readers, about how to practice his eight-point program in today's so complicated world.

Christine Easwaran

Christine Easwaran

For the Board of Trustees

Continued
from page 1

world of *nama* (name) and *rupa* (form) is shabda or sound manifesting itself at varying levels of vibration.

Language is only a very small part of shabda and consists of words in which the relationship between *nama* and *rupa* may be called arbitrary or accidental. For example, there is no intrinsic or inherent connection between the sound *table* and the object “table.” As contrasted with the words of language, *Om* – or *Aum*, as it should be properly pronounced – is a natural name in which there is an intrinsic and inherent connection between *nama* and *rupa*, between the sound and the substance, between the Word and the Reality it represents.

Rama is another perfect natural name that has come down to us through the ages. On the verbal level the word *Rama* means “he who can fill us with abiding joy”; and on the shabda or spiritual level too it means the same. When we try to describe God as *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Absolute Existence, Absolute Knowledge, Absolute Joy), *Rama* may be called a perfect natural name for the third aspect of Absolute Joy. In other words, *Rama* is a spiritual formula for abiding joy bequeathed to humanity by the illumined sages of ancient India.

Let us now turn to an illuminating exposition in the annals of Islam on the power of the Word to evoke Reality:

The shaykh took my hand and led me into the convent. I sat down in the portico, and the shaykh picked up a book and began to read. As is the way of scholars, I could not help wondering what the book was.

The shaykh perceived my thoughts. “Abu Sa’id,” he said,

“all the hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets were sent to preach one word. They bade the people say *Allah* and devote themselves to Him. Those who heard this word by the ear alone let it go out by the other ear; but those who heard it with their souls imprinted it on their souls and repeated it until it penetrated their hearts and souls, and their whole beings became this word. They were made independent of the pronunciation

India, the mantram has opened its doors and taken in the devotee.

As Sri Ramakrishna puts it with prosaic poetry, such a devotee is like an employee who receives his pension from the employer after years of faithful service. He can live on his pension without having to work any more for his livelihood.

One in whom the mantram has become an integral part of consciousness may be thus described in the powerful words of Meister

Eckhart:

After years of patient practice, we come to hear the mantram in our dreams, in our sleep, in the song of the nightingale or the murmur of the brook that babbles by.

Whoever has God in mind, simply and solely God, in all things, such a man carries God with him into all his works and into all places, and God alone does all his works. He seeks nothing but God, nothing seems good to him but God. He becomes one with God in every thought.

Just as no multiplicity can dissipate God, so nothing can dissipate this man or make him multiple.

May the mantram enable us to attain the higher state of consciousness in which nothing can dissipate us or make us multiple! ⇨

of the word; they were released from the sound of the letters. Having understood the spiritual meaning of this word, they became so absorbed in it that they were no more conscious of their own non-existence.

The repetition of the holy name or mantram, called *japam* in Sanskrit, can bring us lasting benefits on the physical, mental, and spiritual levels. But unlike secular disciplines, as the mantram sinks into the deeper levels of consciousness, a wave of joy begins to rise up from the sea of joy that is the Atman. After years of patient practice, we come to hear the mantram in our dreams, in our sleep, in the song of the nightingale or the murmur of the brook that babbles by.

No longer do we have to perform *japam* consciously, because the mantram has become an integral part of our consciousness. It is now *ajapa-japam* (*japam* without *japam*), in which the mantram goes on repeating itself. In the mystical language of ancient

This article is taken from one of Sri Easwaran’s earliest writings: “Japam: The Power of the Holy Name,” first published in 1966 in the Center’s new journal, The Little Lamp. Easwaran had just returned from India with Christine and begun the intensive series of informal talks – “four evenings a week, based on the scriptures, followed by half an hour of meditation” – that gathered the students who would join him at Ramagiri Ashram.



Sri Easwaran with friends on the Nilgiris, South India, early 1960s.

“Should I Just Hide?”

On the Blue Mountain my wife and I had a good British friend who had been close to Mahatma Gandhi. One of this lady’s frequent visitors was an acquaintance with such difficult ways that the very sight of her was enough to elevate our friend’s blood pressure. One day she asked me, “What should I do? Should I just hide when I see her coming and refuse to answer the door?”

“No, no,” I said. “Just repeat your mantram – Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.”

After a week or so she came to me again. “It’s no use,” she said. “Once I hear that particular knock, my mind gets agitated before I even think of the mantram.”

I got a good idea. “Make it a race,” I suggested. “The moment you see her turn in at the gate, start the mantram going. See if it can get into your consciousness before she gets to the door.”

Our friend kept at it with real British bulldog persistence. One day I was pleased to hear her announce, “Oh, by the way, do you remember my friend So-and-so? I don’t get agitated around her any more. When I see her coming up the walk, the mantram dashes along next to her and beats her to the door.”

This is one of the simplest ways of learning to be patient: just repeat the mantram. When irritation calls and demands an immediate answer, the mantram puts it on hold. The mind gets a few precious minutes to prepare itself, so that it can push the harsh words back. In other words, the mantram gives us a chance to respond the way we choose. ⇨

The Mantram as a Divine Tool

A primal state of fear

My younger daughter has been hearing the mantram since she was adopted at 4 months of age. I sang it to her as a baby, we said it before meals, and we wrote and drew it during her grade school years. She loved writing it and I have many pages of her mantram art and writings as a child.

When she was 13 years old, our family went skiing. We were beginning our last run. It was getting late and there was a thin crust of ice on top of the snow. We got through most of the run and had one more hill to face. As we prepared for our final descent, we nodded and took off.

I fell head over heels tumbling and losing my skis and poles but I was uninjured. My fall caused a commotion and my older daughter and fiancé came to my aid and helped me down the rest of the hill. When we got to the bottom of the hill, my younger daughter was missing. We searched for her but she was nowhere to be found. After thirty minutes we got a call that she was in the first aid station.

We found her on a bed with paramedics caring for her. Someone took her to first aid during the time I was being helped. She wasn't unconscious nor was she conscious. She was uncontrollably sobbing and couldn't hear us. I tried to speak to her and calm her but she didn't respond. She was in a primal state of fear.

I pulled up a chair, leaned forward, placed my hand on her head and began to whisper "Rama" into her ear. She immediately stopped sobbing. Her breathing regulated and her heart rate slowed. She became calm and appeared to fall asleep. After about ten minutes, I thought she was asleep and took a pause. She cried out again, began sobbing and breathing rapidly and began that strange wail. I began "Rama" once again and her breathing became slow and rhythmic and she was calm.

We held on to the mantram on the way to the hospital and until she was in deep sleep. She has no memory of the fall or the period afterwards and has totally recovered. But my family and I witnessed something very powerful that day. During her early years the mantram had rooted deeply into her consciousness and it was there to help her through her fear and pain. It truly is a divine tool.

Rage as a sledgehammer

At 12:22 a.m. on the night after Christmas, a drunk driver slammed into my aging Honda parked on the street. He hit it with enough force to hurl it forward twenty feet, where it crashed into my mother's car and knocked it up onto the neighbor's parking strip.

While the cops arrested the driver, I stared tearfully at my totaled car. Within seconds, I was struck by a rage I could barely control. My greatest desire was to hurl the flashlight straight at the guy's head with as much force as possible.

But the next instant it occurred to me to repeat the mantram. I was looking at the guy's face while the police talked to him, and to my utter astonishment the mantram stopped the rage dead in its tracks. In its place, I felt compassion for this down-and-out-looking driver.

Later, I admit, I went back to feeling less than happy with the guy. But the rage was gone, and the compassion was still there. Like Easwaran says, when you use the mantram with the energy from your anger, it acts like a sledgehammer to drive the mantram deep. What a lesson!

A mantram offensive

I have been dealing with some ghosts from the past that came to haunt my mind. These ghosts tend to turn up in packs, the cowards! My mind can be very persistent in holding on to old pains and memories, so this time I tried to fight them off with a mantram offensive to keep my mind focused and get it off dwelling on myself.

With the risk of sounding like a bad "tell-sell" commercial, I have to say the result has been really surprising. In just a few weeks my mind is so much clearer. My compulsive thoughts have less of a grip on me.

But that was not the entire lesson. The amazing eye-opener for me is that the fight has released a strange sort of energy. This might sound weird, but it feels like there is more room for love and devotion, and also for thankfulness – all in the form of energy.

So now the fight continues, but with more faith and enthusiasm. ☺



The Mantram and Children

The mantram in the womb

I hadn't seen my friend in 10 years. She surprised me when she reminded me that 15 years ago, I told her that I repeated "my God and my all" whenever I felt stressed or worried. She's been using it ever since.

I was especially amazed when she told me she used the mantram when she had to have tests while pregnant with her son. There he was, a tall, inquisitive 15 year old, and he wanted to learn to meditate! Living proof of Easwaran's wisdom: we give our children a very special gift when we say the mantram to them in the womb.

"That's just a load of silly words"

I was having a lovely time doing a bit of gardening with my young daughter this afternoon. I told her that often I do the mantram as I'm gardening. She calmly said "that's just a load of silly words that don't mean anything or make me feel better." Then she skipped off with her trowel in hand . . . I started doing my mantram. I have to say it did amuse me too.

A purple tongue

I picked my daughter up from school and I noticed that her tongue was purple. I asked her what had happened and she said, "Mom, I got so hungry today that I just couldn't stand it. I said my mantram for a long

time, but finally I just had to lick my smelly marker."

Today, I am happy to report she packed more snacks for school and came home with a clean tongue. But I am most thrilled to know that she remembered to use her mantram!

Who's the teacher here, anyway?

Just after dinner, my daughter started writing her mantram, *rama rama rama rama*, as we were going to bed. That's a good idea, I thought. So, I sat down and got my notebook out and started writing my mantram. We wrote together for five minutes and then I told her it was time to go to bed because it was past our bedtime. I usually give the kids a few minutes to read in bed so I went upstairs and did my evening wind-down journaling and 20 minutes later or so I checked in with her and she was awake in bed, still writing her mantram. She'd covered a page, both sides, and then some. Then, she took it out of the book and put it under her pillow to give her good dreams. She said she had tried putting a dream catcher under there, but it didn't work without the mantram. She said that if you fall asleep repeating the mantram, with the mantram written on a page under your pillow, that works best.

So . . . who's the teacher here, anyway? ⇨

The Mystery of the Mantram: Questions & Answers

By Eknath Easwaran

I love your method of meditation, but the mantram still seems a mystery. I can't see how just repeating a word over and over can do anything, even if it comes from a saint.

THE PRACTICAL ANSWER is just to try it and see for yourself. So far as I know, we still don't really understand how aspirin works, yet we have faith in aspirin. When you take the bottle off the bathroom shelf and pop a couple of pills into your mouth, you are saying in effect, "I believe. I have faith that this will work." I would say, "Take plenty of mantrams too." It is equally good advice: one for fever in the body, the other for the fever of self-will.

People sometimes retort, "We don't think it will work." I reply, "Don't you think you can give the Buddha or Jesus the Christ as much credence as you give Mr. Bayer?" That is all I am asking for. Try it. If you only feel comforted by things that come in a bottle, which I can understand, take an empty bottle and write *Rama, Rama* or *Jesus, Jesus* on the label. Then put it on your bathroom shelf. When you have a disquieting afternoon or evening or night, take it down, look at it, and start repeating your mantram. You have taken the medicine.

How can we get established in the mantram the way you describe?

RAMDAS ADVISES, "HAVE the mantram constantly in your mind." That is the first and last instruction where japam or repetition of the mantram is concerned.

Make use of every spare moment to repeat your mantram. A million opportunities can be discovered during the course of a single day, and of course when you are falling asleep at night.

There may come a time when you cannot sleep and find it almost impossible to go on repeating the holy name hour after hour. The mind gets tired. At such times, I used to ask Sri Krishna in my heart to make it a joy for me to recite his name. As a result, now it is not a discipline; I do it with all the joy of indiscipline. I have no limits now, no restraints. I do it all the time, which is what going beyond all disciplines means. But you have to struggle with disciplines for a long, long time before this kind of spiritual freedom comes.

In my own practice, for example, I found that gradually – over a long, long period, not immediately – the period of japam will go on increasing, particularly when deepening meditation means you don't need so much sleep at night, so that you lie awake resting your body in bed and resting your mind through japam.

The dramatic moment comes when your meditation and japam together amount to over twelve hours. When it becomes about thirteen hours, you have a say in what you're going to think; you have a say in what you're going to feel. Gradually, fourteen, fifteen hours of conscious sovereignty over the mind brings increasing freedom in your thoughts and feelings, in your very life. That's the motivation for repeating the mantram.

How about the time when you won't be here to guide us in the body?

ACCORDING TO SWAMI Ramdas,

when you go on repeating the mantram that your teacher has given you, you'll feel the presence of the teacher always with you. That's why the mantram is said to be the bond between the teacher and the student.

When you become established in your mantram, the mantram is your real guru, because the mantram is God.

Can you give us an idea of what it feels like when the mantram is established?

WHEN YOU HAVE unified your desires through the practice of meditation, the repetition of the mantram and the observance of all the other disciplines, when the mantram has become established in your consciousness, what may happen is that you go out for a walk, say, and all of a sudden there is a kind of fast tremor running up the spinal column until it almost explodes in your head. You hear *aaaaauuummm* and then inside there is tremendous vibration. It can last for about a minute or two. When this happens, stop where you are and repeat the mantram. Don't get excited, don't gloat over it, but stop where you are – if necessary sit down, because it can upset your balance – and keep repeating the mantram until the vibration subsides, probably in a minute or two.

Which mantram you have been using doesn't matter; when you hear this sound, it will be very much like *Om*. That is the nearest phonetic equivalent a human being can give.

These are the signs by which you can reasonably guess that you are on the way, doing very well in becoming established in japam.

You cannot anticipate this at all. You can never prepare yourself for it. If you have been really meditating well and observing the allied disciplines, it comes and goes. For a long, long time it's like that. Then it is finally that you

become established in it after years of this repetition. The proof is when you have a compulsive attachment, you can free yourself from it simply by the repetition of the mantram embedded in your consciousness.

I read that when the astronauts went to the moon, they established a base from which they were able, with their radio telescope, to hear signals from the depths of the universe because everything was still; there was no interference from earth at all. Similarly, when we reach the supreme state, we discover the truth of what the Bible tells us: "Be still, and know that I am God." Everything is still. St. Augustine has a beautiful description of this stillness which I have included in my collection of passages for meditation, *God Makes the Rivers to Flow*.

It is in this stillness that you may hear the *pranava*, the supreme cosmic sound, *Aum* or *Om*.

When a powerful emotion like anger is sweeping me away, is it best to repeat the mantram and just walk away?

IF YOU CAN, it is very helpful to go out for a fast walk around the block or up and down the hall, repeating the mantram to yourself the whole way. Once your mind has quieted down, you can reflect with some detachment on how painful the long-term consequences of our anger are likely to be for everyone, including yourself. That's a kind of first aid.

But it is helpful to remember that of itself, a strong urge is not something negative. It is power rising, which the mantram can transform for positive use. Anger is one of the most destructive emotions on earth, but the mantram can turn even this fearful power into compassion, as we can see in the life of Mahatma Gandhi.

How to effect this transformation over the long run depends upon the person and particularly the age group.

If you are young, for example, I would suggest not just going for a fast walk but going up a long slope repeating the mantram. That's the principle behind pilgrims in India climbing the Himalayas. These sages know what to do about strong urges. You try climbing up to ten thousand feet, all the time repeating your mantram. By the time you get there, every negative passion will become sublimated into deep spiritual longing.

For those who are not capable of these physical exploits, I would suggest trying longer walks, two or three hours repeating the mantram. There have been occasions when I have walked three to four hours. It's really a championship trial. When a tremendously strong passion like anger has picked you up, in the first bout you won't make any impression at all. You feel like going back to your corner and not coming out again. But if you can keep walking repeating the mantram every time the tidal wave of anger picks you up, after two or three or four hours you can see that you are the master of the situation. Then you see that this tremendous impulse was the offer of additional power to you. It is that aspect I would emphasize. Look upon these bouts as potential power crying out, "Harness me!"

So we can use the mantram to prevent this kind of agitation?

IT IS NOT so much preventing as minimizing to a very small degree the movement of the mind. Encased as we are in a physical body, it is not possible for many of us to completely still the mind in the face of provocation. In most people, when there is agitation, the mind moves back and forth, up and down, like a hammock. It goes on swinging, and we rather enjoy that swinging in a negative way. When we practice meditation, repeat the mantram, and observe the allied disciplines, what happens is that the

hammock swings less and less. After a lot of practice, we arrive at the state where, if someone does or says something unkind, there is only a slight swinging of the mind and we are able to stabilize it. But we should always expect a little movement.

When I'm upset I find it really hard to keep the mantram going, and I can't always leave the office, for instance, for a fast walk. Do you have any other suggestions?

KEEP A NOTEBOOK at home and at work, and if you find your mind getting agitated, keep writing the mantram with concentration for one or two pages. You will find that the manual activity helps to focus and steady your mind.

Can I give my mantram to family members and friends? I'd so like them to feel the benefit.

FOLLOW A GREAT South Indian mystic, Ramanuja, whose teacher told him, "Don't reveal your mantram to anybody. They will gain the benefit, but you will lose it all." Ramanuja went straight to the temple tower and called, "Listen to me, everybody who can hear! I want all of you to be happy, even if it means I will be miserable all my life." Of course, his teacher was highly pleased. So share your mantram with anybody who asks for it; I will take the responsibility.

I get caught up in things during the day and forget all about the eight-point program. How can I help remember it more often?

ONE THING MANY people find helpful is to put little reminders where you will see them. I have friends who keep flash cards with them as reminders. But one of the best ways is simply to keep using the mantram as much as

you can. It will remind you of all the rest.

In particular, whenever you feel you are about to lose control, hold on tight to your mantram. Use it endlessly. Then you will never forget the eight-point program, and you will have no trouble with negative emotions. That is what the mantram can do.

Gradually, as you pour your heart into it, the mantram becomes filled with all your longing for Self-realization. That will remind you of all your spiritual disciplines and inspire you to ever-greater effort.

When I first began using the mantram, I felt a very strong connection with it. But as time has gone on, it's harder and harder to use it.

THE MANTRAM CAN'T help working if you go on repeating it faithfully. Don't wait until you feel upset to use it. You can repeat the mantram anytime, and the more you repeat it, even if you feel it's not working, the more likely it will be there when you need to draw on it in a crisis.

It is amazing how many opportunities you can find during the day, no matter how busy you may be. You may find it helpful to keep a notebook in your room or at your place of work, so you can write the mantram whenever you get a minute or two. If you commute, use the time for the mantram. When you are waiting, doing mechanical chores, or find yourself about to talk unnecessarily or say something harsh or critical about someone else, repeat the mantram. Even on occasions when your patience is legitimately tried, use your irritation to deepen the mantram. Irritation, exasperation, frustration, boredom, the desire to keep the tongue moving, are all hammers you can use to drive the mantram deep into the mind, so it can work and heal in the depths of the unconscious.

You said the mantram can help us when we're in pain. Could you say more about that?

FIND THE MANTRAM helpful everywhere, even in mundane trials. My dentist and dental assistant think I am a stoic, but they are wrong; I simply know how to use my mantram. I am quite sensitive to pain, but as soon as I get into the dental chair I say, "Don't try to tell me who won the baseball game or who is going to get an Academy Award. Just turn the music off and let me repeat my mantram."

I close my eyes and start to repeat *Rama, Rama, Rama*, and within minutes my attention is absorbed. It is not that the drill no longer hurts, but there is no fear of it in my mind; and it is fear that makes pain hard to bear.

You may remember my story of how, when I was a little boy, I hurt my right leg playing soccer. It became infected, so my grandmother had me taken to a doctor she knew in my neighboring town. He washed the wound as gently as he could while I winced. Then he told me apologetically, "Now I am going to apply tincture of iodine."

Now, tincture of iodine had a solid reputation among the boys in my school. I had heard many stories about how much it hurt and how terribly I would suffer. So, naturally, I closed my eyes. I felt the doctor's touch on my leg and then a wash of pain across the wound, and I imagine I must have yelled the roof off.

After a few minutes I noticed the pain had subsided, so I opened my eyes. "Is it over?" I asked. The doctor looked at me with great compassion and said, "I haven't even applied the iodine yet."

I learned two great lessons that day: one, it is fear of pain that makes us suffer; and two, to listen to my grandmother when she said to repeat the mantram. When fear of pain goes,

suffering becomes manageable.

And that is what the mantram can do. Whether it is a headache, a stomach-ache, or serious injury, the mantram always helps.

I want to add that I am not against any reasonable painkiller in the hands of a skilled physician, but whether you have chemical aid or not, repeat the mantram. Not only will it help you manage pain yourself, but the experience will drive the mantram deeper into your consciousness. The next time you need it, the mantram will work from an even deeper level.

Why does the Bhagavad Gita call the mantram a purifier?

MEDITATION HELPS THE mantram, and the mantram helps meditation. Both work together in the mind to resolve old conditioning so that we can shape our consciousness around a new ideal of our own choosing. That is what purification means. In practice, it means simply the reduction of self-will, a large part of which is simply dwelling on oneself to the exclusion of those around us.

This is very much an internal process. For the transformation of consciousness to be complete, we have to put these new ideals into practice in daily living. So it is very important, right from the beginning, to give your very best not only to meditation, but to the repetition of the mantram and all the other disciplines which apply the power of meditation to daily living.

If, after your meditation, you go off to dwell on yourself and try to avoid people or challenges around you, your consciousness may have been elevated a little in your morning meditation, but it will take the shape of loneliness and separateness during the rest of the day. This is the time to repeat the mantram and be with people, to keep your senses and mind from wandering, to work harmoniously with others and give your complete concentration

to the job at hand. In all these ways you are keeping consciousness from reassuming its old, painfully rigid forms.

Once I went for a swim at the home of a friend who had an Olympic-sized pool. Floating around in this pool was some kind of gadget that I couldn't quite figure out, so I asked my host, "What is that for?"

He said, "That's a pool sweep. It keeps on chugging around, removing impurities from the pool wherever it finds them."

I couldn't help teasing him: "You're very careful about keeping this pool clean and pure, but wouldn't you like to purify the pool inside, too?"

He looked blank. I used his language: "*Rama* is an effective pool sweep for the mind; it can float about and remove impurities wherever it finds them, twenty-four hours a day."

When you are angry, when you are afraid, when you are frustrated or agitated, don't take it out on other people; in the long run, this will only add to your mind's negative conditioning. And don't take it out on yourself, either. Go for a fast walk, repeating your mantram in your mind. As your breathing becomes more regular, so will your thoughts. Gradually you can replace angry thoughts with loving ones, agitated thoughts with calm ones.

So whenever you have a tendency to think about yourself – how much you can get, how much you can grab, or how unfairly life is treating you – don't talk about it, don't analyze it; go for a walk repeating the mantram. This is one of the easiest methods of dealing with thinking about yourself. You will gradually find that the mantram will slowly reduce the level of self-will. After many years, the mantram combined with meditation will bring the mind to a stillness. When the mind is still, there is no self-will. When there is no self-will, the mind is still.

Is it all right to repeat my mantram for other people? Does it help them?

WHEN YOU GET established in your mantram, according to our saints, you can even allocate your japam to a person in need. It's a wonderful gift usually possessed by saints, but all of us can aim at that. When somebody close to you is in need, you can say to yourself, "I'm repeating this mantram for that person's benefit."

It is a kind of repetition of the mantram by proxy. The person is not able to do it, so you are doing it for them. In that way you can allocate your repetition of the mantram to that person, not only when you are with that person but at other times also.

Everyone today must be anxious about what the future holds for their children. How can we help them learn to use the mantram so they have some kind of protection?

THE REPETITION OF the mantram is a very valuable tool for all children everywhere. It can be used while going to the dentist. It can be used during examination time. It can be used at school. It can be used while competing in school.

You can introduce it through the life of Mahatma Gandhi. Explain how great a blessing he has been to the world and then, when they ask you "How did he become like that?" you talk about the power of the mantram.

There is no mantram better for children than Gandhi's mantram, *Rama*, but you can also suggest your own mantram if it has been chosen from my list. It can be a great benefit when all members of the family use the same mantram.

For the little ones, when they are crying, you can sing the mantram. That's the best lullaby, and this is how you let the mantram get deeper into the mind of the child even before he

or she is aware. That is how I received the power of the mantram from my grandmother, without even knowing that I was receiving it.

If you want to know when my spiritual life started, personally I started halfway through life, but my spiritual life really began in my mother's womb when she was repeating her mantram given by her mother, who was God-conscious, repeating it all the time, so I got the full benefit of it. I was born with a spiritual spoon in my mouth.

In most religious homes in India the training of the baby starts with the mother when she's pregnant. Just as nourishing food taken by the mother strengthens the baby, a nourishing mantram repeated by the mother strengthens the baby. One is strengthening the body, the other is strengthening the mind.

Teach your child to repeat the mantram at night. Many of my friends sing the mantram to their children as a lullaby; it is more important than bedtime storytelling. Let Humpty-Dumpty fall, let Jack and Jill go up the hill; the mantram can't wait. It will remove fears from your child's heart; it will refresh your child's sleep.

Similarly, whenever your child is afraid or angry, just teach him or her to repeat the mantram. And the very best way to teach a child anything is for the father and mother to practice it themselves. The mantram may take a while to catch on, but it will give your children armor that the forces of life cannot break.

I have a close relative who is dying. Can I use my mantram to help her?

PEOPLE WHO ARE seriously ill, perhaps in their last days, can benefit from the mantram greatly. If they cannot repeat it, hold their hand and keep repeating your mantram silently for them. Some part of your awareness will reach them. You will see

for yourself how comforted they will become because of the depth from which you are able to repeat the holy name.

When I have had occasion to sit by the side of someone who is dying, I just hold his or her hand and repeat my mantram silently. There is no need to talk at such times. Just being together and repeating the mantram, especially if the person is responsive to us, can help a great deal to calm the turbulence that overtakes the mind at the onset of death.

I remember when one of our oldest and dearest friends passed on. I had known her for thirty years, and I used to tell her that she was one of the most valiant women I had met in my life.

During the last years, when she saw her body slowly deteriorating, she became more and more of a recluse. But that did not prevent her from following all our disciplines and keeping in close touch with me through friends. Even so, I was taken aback when I received a message saying that she was dying and would like to see me immediately.

We were shown to her room, where I found her no longer conscious of the physical world. I sat by her side, held her hand, and repeated my mantram, and was reassured to see the great peace that came over her. Even though I was not able to have any verbal communication with her, I felt sure that, as India's great spiritual tradition teaches, there was a much deeper communication because of the great love that still flows between us. I wrote a note and left it for her nurse to read to her if she regained consciousness, saying that the connection between us will not end now but will continue.

Death is probably the most important subject that human beings have to understand, yet in our modern civilization it is one of the least understood. While I stood looking in deep affection at my friend as she lay unconscious on the last day of her mortal life, I did not

see just her; I saw many, many of my friends, one by one, as if her face changed while I watched. This is not a unique experience; it is considered one of the most significant of spiritual experiences, and one that is narrated in all spiritual traditions.

How about the end of life for those of us who are practicing your eight-point program?

WHAT OCCUPIES OUR consciousness at the moment of death is of the utmost importance. That is why in India some great scripture like the Bhagavad Gita is usually read aloud while a person is dying, so that something of its message will be with that person in his final moments.

Very much the same thing is done in other great religions. Even more effective in this critical transition is for the dying person to repeat the mantram over and over in the mind. The mantram is always a powerful ally, and if we can cling to it at the time of death, we will already have focused a good deal of our consciousness on the Lord.

The records of the Christian mystics too are full of inspiring accounts of how mortal men and women can face the challenge of death in calmness and with faith. We can read the account of Teresa of Avila's death, and nearer to our own times we have the story of Thérèse of Lisieux. Both were exalted in their last moments by a vision of Christ coming to rescue them from the sea of death.

Even ordinary men and women like you and me can receive this kind of assurance if we practice meditation and the allied disciplines with real earnestness. In my own life I have had such a blessing. I hadn't been meditating for many years, but my progress had been rapid, thanks to my grandmother's influence. One night in a dream, if you like to call it that, I saw myself all alone, drowning in a vast

shoreless sea – the sea of *samsara*, the sea of birth and death. I was about to despair when from the depths of my consciousness I cried out to Sri Krishna to save me. That night I knew that Sri Krishna had come to me and pulled me up out of the sea of death.

Since that time I have had complete confidence that the Lord will always come to my rescue when I call on him from the depths of my heart. That is why I recommend the mantram with such certitude, because I know without doubt it can be relied upon in times of distress. This is the advice many great mystics have given us: to call upon the Lord, by whatever name we use, to help us overcome our enemy, death.

What can we do now to prepare for the time when we are dying?

IF WE BEGIN now to repeat the mantram, and repeat it whenever we get an opportunity, it will be there when we need it even in the turmoil of the body's final hours.

Even though our repetition may seem mechanical to begin with, if we practice meditation earnestly and support our meditation with a program of spiritual living, the mantram will enable us to go deeper and deeper into our consciousness. Practice is the important thing, and sustained enthusiasm.

Life is so short, and this discovery so urgent and so arduous, that none of us can afford to waste a day in not doing our best to move closer to the goal. Please take advantage of every opportunity to repeat the mantram, to train your senses, to keep on transforming your passions.

And please be regular about your meditation. Don't lose a single day; don't waste a moment doing selfish things. All this time can be utilized for discovering the Self and for going beyond death here on this earth. ⇨

Beyond Change, Beyond Death

In these last stages of sadhana, we are trying to keep consciousness in a continuous, unbroken channel. The morning and evening periods of meditation set the standard; then we try to extend these periods of one-pointed attention through the rest of the day. While we are working at something, we give the job our complete attention. And the minute the job is over, we start the mantram. Attention must become one smooth-flowing stream from morning to night and through the night until morning again. In a sense, it is like taking two ends of consciousness and trying to bring them together into a closed circle, so that there is no leakage of *prana* [vitality] at all.

At the beginning of sadhana, this may not seem like much of an achievement. We have hold of about ten degrees of the circle, so we have no idea of what it means to close the other three hundred fifty degrees. But as the ends of the circle get closer, it is like trying to close floodgates against a powerful river. The smaller the opening across a river, the faster the water flows through. It is the same in consciousness. All the thoughts that could not get our attention while we were meditating or repeating the mantram, all twenty-four hours worth of them, are just waiting to rush in if we give them an opening.

Last to be closed are the hours of nighttime. As you begin to wake up inside, it is only natural to find yourself wakeful for hours while you lie in bed at night. These are terribly critical times, for there is very little to do to keep the mind engaged. To keep attention from wandering, all you have to hang on to is the mantram. And the fight is on.

At this stage, concentration is really deep. For five, ten, fifteen minutes you stand inside a kind of magic circle: your mind is absorbed in the mantram, so no other thought can come in. But then you become aware of all kinds of other thoughts outside, skulking around trying to tempt you out.

As long as you cling to the mantram, all that these fierce distractions can do is dance around and try to tempt you out. Anyone can get drawn outside by all this hullabaloo; and once you get outside, your *samskaras* [conditioning] will beat you up. They cannot finish you off, but they will pummel all the *prana* out of you, rob you of your security, and run away, leaving you with a sinking heart.

But on the other hand, there is no need to feel panicky when seductive distractions come; they are an essential part of the drama. If there were no villain, the play could not be acted. All you can do is cling to the mantram and not let your mind even flicker to these thoughts. Grit your teeth and let them caper all they like. Eventually, if you do

not give them an audience, they will get tired and go away.

Even in sleep this struggle goes on. Then it is like shadow-boxing in a world of shadows. You are deep in the unconscious, which is *terra incognita* for the will. Yet you have to learn to wake up even in the unconscious; the whole of the mind must be flooded with light. This usually happens in stages. When you are sunk in sleep, part of you is awake with a little will, and that part tries to repeat the mantram. Sometimes you cannot even remember it. There is something you are supposed to be doing, but you cannot think what it is; or if you remember the *Ra-*, you cannot remember the *-ma*.

If all this seems agonizing, it is the most delicious agony in sadhana. Words cannot describe these experiences. They are so far beyond the realm of everyday thought and sensation that in both East and West, aspirants fall back here on poetry and the language of a lover to his or her Beloved. In these last stages, the Sufis say, all veils but one have fallen from the object of our desire. We can make out the eyes of the Beloved, the hair, the smile, but nothing clearly, and all other desires are consumed in the overwhelming longing to tear that last veil aside.

Every day there is this delightful pain of separation, this impatient patience. You expect the veil to fall that very evening, yet you are prepared to wait another day more. Mystics everywhere speak this way, and scholars just throw up their hands and leave. They want rational talk and all they get is contradiction. It is not that mystics are inadequate when it comes to logic; the inadequacy is in language. Give them a language that embraces opposites, that transcends the senses; then they will express all this. Otherwise words have to fail.

All sorts of signs come now that the end of your years of searching is very near. It is like waiting for the curtain to go up on a play for which you have been waiting a hundred years. You are seated in the front row, the theater is full; now the lights are dimmed and everyone falls still in breathless anticipation. Behind the curtain you can see tantalizing glimpses: props being adjusted, the last-minute movements of stagehands, a ripple of the heavy draperies as someone brushes by. Every morning in meditation, every evening as you fall asleep, it is as if the whole universe is waiting for the play to begin at last.

And finally, just when you do not expect it, the curtain rises and you are lifted out of time into the unitive state, beyond change, beyond death.

– From “*Essence of the Upanishads*,” by Eknath Easwaran

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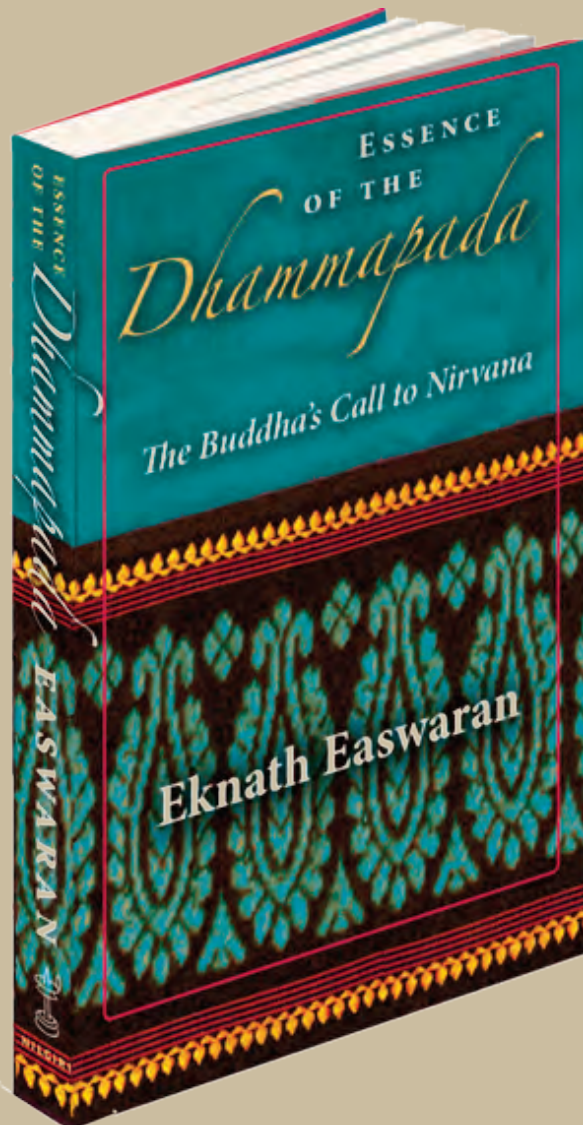
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