



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 Second Half of Life

By Eknath Easwaran

SOON AFTER my eightieth birthday, I was walking on Stinson Beach with friends when I saw a huge eagle soar by overhead. As it came lower, I was astonished to see it was actually a young-looking chap flying just like a bird. He made a perfect landing a few yards beyond us. I thought, "What an extraordinary skill for a young fellow to acquire!" So we went up to him. He had a kind of mask on, and when he took it off I saw he wasn't young at all.

"If you don't mind my asking," I said with surprise, "how old are you?"

"Seventy-eight," he replied proudly, "and I'm going to do this until I fall down dead."

"How long did you take to learn?" I asked innocently. (I'm always alert for good copy.)

"Three years," he said, "practicing every day." Then he added encouragingly, "You can learn too."

I wanted to tell him that I do this every day in meditation: fly high where even the soaring eagles cannot reach and then come back down to earth and make a perfect landing. I thought he could have spent his enthusiasm in a higher cause, but all I said was that I had more useful skills to learn — and teach.

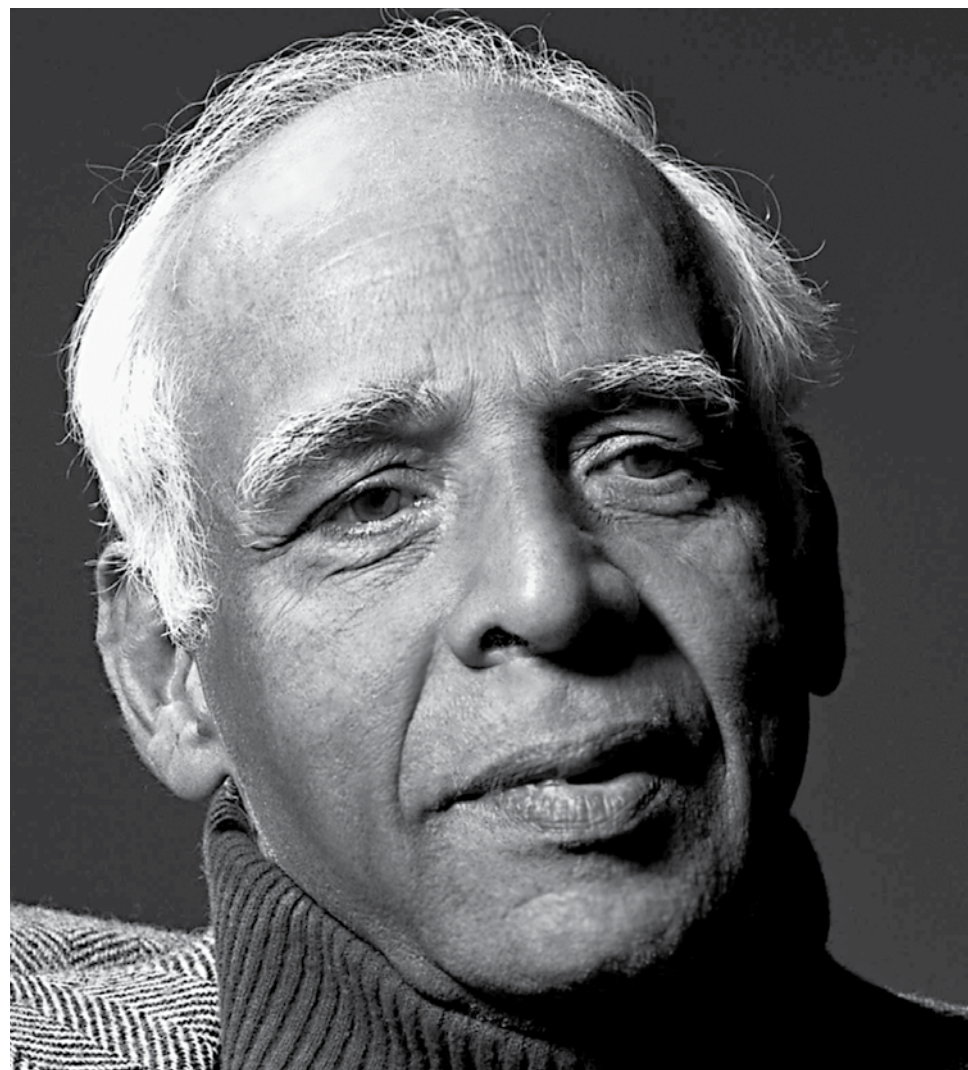
Leaping off cliffs is fine for twenty-year-olds, I wanted to say, but not worth the time of a mature person. The human being needs challenges, and we do not find adequate challenges in modern life. I'm told that hang gliding is a perilous sport that affords a lot of challenge. I don't think it is perilous enough. Try conquering your anger! When you are bursting with fury against somebody

with whom you are emotionally entangled, somebody who has provoked you until you are about to explode and shoot off into outer space like a missile, try to move closer to that person, to be kind to that person, to do something good for that person; then you will find a challenge worthy of a human being.

When people go on climbing impossibly dangerous mountains, crossing the Sahara on foot or the Atlantic by canoe, surfing in the sky or spelunking under the sea, what they are really looking for is a challenge worthy of the infinite desire with which all of us are born. Many, many people go through life without

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Eknath Easwaran, 1974



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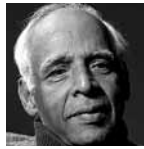
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1 The Second Half of Life



Invited to learn hang gliding at the age of 80, Eknath Easwaran reflects on what the second half of life is really for. "The human being needs challenges," he says, but from a spiritual perspective, the point of the first half of life is to learn that physical challenges cannot ever satisfy us. By the time we pass the midpoint of our lives, we should be facing challenges more worthy of a human being.

8 The Eight-Point Program in the Second Half of Life

In many ways, the years of retirement seem perfect for meditation. Our time is finally our own! All the more reason, Sri Easwaran says, to build each day around the regular daily practice of meditation. Here he points out some of the subtle shifts in the practice of each of the eight points that come as the body ages.

Easwaran's advice is accompanied by comments from some of the friends in our eSatsang group who are facing these challenges themselves.

Articles by Eknath Easwaran in this journal are taken from previously published works and unpublished material in our archive.

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Blue Mountain Center of Meditation

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

Passage Meditation: An Eight-Point Program

1. **MEDITATION ON A PASSAGE** Silent repetition in the mind of memorized inspirational passages from the world's great religions. Practiced for one-half hour each morning.
2. **REPETITION OF A MANTRAM** Silent repetition in the mind of a Holy Name or a hallowed phrase from one of the world's great religions. Practiced whenever possible throughout the day or night.
3. **SLOWING DOWN** Setting priorities and reducing the stress and friction caused by hurry.
4. **ONE-POINTED ATTENTION** Giving full concentration to the matter at hand.
5. **TRAINING THE SENSES** Overcoming conditioned habits and learning to enjoy what is beneficial.
6. **PUTTING OTHERS FIRST** Gaining freedom from selfishness and separateness; finding joy in helping others.
7. **SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP** Spending time regularly with other passage meditators for mutual inspiration and support.
8. **SPIRITUAL READING** Drawing inspiration from writings by and about the world's great spiritual figures and from the scriptures of all religions.

Eknath Easwaran

Schooled in both Eastern and Western traditions, Eknath Easwaran took to the spiritual life amidst a successful career in India as a professor of English literature, a writer, and a lecturer. 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.

Living at Its Highest



Christine Easwaran

WE ARE continuing Sri Easwaran's survey of the four stages of human life according to Indian tradition, focusing in this issue on the stage that begins roughly around the time of retirement, when social obligations and material ambitions have been fulfilled and we are free (at least within the constraints of health and finances) to spend our time as we like. "It is a golden period," as a dear friend says, "when you can give your energies to things you care about."

But these years bring challenges too. "The characteristics of this stage of life," she continues, "are that your children leave home and your parents die. You are faced at the same time with the loss of that youthful vitality of your children and also with the question of death."

"When my twenty-year-old daughter is home," she adds, "her friends are there, they giggle all night, they're always dashing off somewhere, the phones are ringing, wash is dripping everywhere. Then she's gone and it's all quiet again, with just me and my husband trying to build a new life. And almost every month there's something like my mother's ninetieth birthday or needing to spend time with an elderly aunt or there's a funeral. You find yourself side by side with a twenty-year-old or side by side

with a ninety-year-old. My daughter speeds life up like crazy. It slows down when she goes. Then I'm sitting with an old granny and life hardly moves at all."

At such times we may well feel we are caught between generations before we have figured out how to cope with our own lives.

In fact, alongside the glowing illustrations of exotic golf courses and improbably dazzling beaches, I read that retirement continues to be one of the most stressful of life events. Millions of people in this stage of life are anxious about health, burdened by bereavement, worried about aged parents and unsettled children, facing the stress of coping with change. And these are golden years?

And yet, Sri Easwaran insists, they are – or can be, provided we can hold on to our ideals and have a way to realize those ideals in daily life. That, he tells us in our lead article, is the real purpose of the second half of life. In the first half, he explains, we are expected to learn that material things and physical challenges cannot satisfy us. Then it is time for "a challenge worthy of a human being": nothing less than the pursuit of Self-realization in a life of selfless service.

Just last week I watched a video of a talk in which Sri Easwaran pointed out that one hundred years ago, life expectancy in the US was only 47 years. Today it is over 75 for men and almost 81 for women, and in many other countries even longer. "But I am not impressed just by longevity," Easwaran confided with passion. "I want full living at its highest. Physically, I know, a certain amount of slowing down is taking place, but the inward quality of living – the desire to give, the desire to contribute, the desire to improve, to leave a better world for all children to live in – this is what I call living fully, to the height and depth of one's being."

With all the hyperbole today about

"living fully," we need to see that he is emphasizing living *for others*: finding fulfillment not so much in activities we enjoy as in tireless selfless service, giving time, skills, and resources unstintingly to improve the lives of those around us. Only in this way, he says, can we repay our debt to life and dissolve the barriers that keep us separate from the rest of creation.

I think it came as a surprise to Easwaran to see that without planning to follow the ancient Indian pattern, that is precisely what he did when he retired from the security of his professorship in India to teach meditation in the US. From the very beginning, men and women in their own retirement years responded with the skills, expertise, and material support he needed in addition to the energy of his Berkeley students. The solid growth of the Blue Mountain Center over the years, but especially after Easwaran's passing, could not have come without this kind of assistance from many close friends who, like Easwaran, have made a second career of helping the BMCM in staff positions from proofreading to full-time involvement in our publishing, programs, and administration.

Of course, in Easwaran's eyes, living "to the height and depth of one's being" requires meditation – "the whole program I follow," as he says here, "all eight points." He addresses some of the practical aspects of meditation and aging in our second article, "The Eight-Point Program in the Second Half of Life" (p. 8). Sidebars for this article include quotations from members of our online forums who are using these disciplines to face the challenges that come with this stage of our lives.

Christine Easwaran

For the Board of Trustees

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learning that physical exploits cannot offer this kind of challenge, which is what the first half of life is for. But there are a rare few who become so restless that nothing can satisfy them. They have tried sky-diving and hang gliding, jumped the Grand Canyon on a motor-bike, climbed all the eight-thousand-meter peaks of the Himalayas solo; still there is an emptiness in their hearts. Men and women like these are truly gifted, because nothing superficial, nothing finite can satisfy them. There is a marvelous outburst in the Upanishads which thrilled me the first time I read it and continues to thrill me always: "There is no joy in the finite. There is joy only in the infinite." This is the glory of the human being.

All the world's great scriptures and mystics agree that not even the greatest of worldly achievements will satisfy us completely. Nothing finite can ever satisfy us. Sooner or later, all the vitality that has gone into pursuing a thousand goals in the outer world must one day flow into one huge, torrential desire to discover that divine presence in the heart. In every mystical tradition, lovers of God exclaim with Saint Augustine, "Lord, how can I ever find rest anywhere else when I am made to find rest in thee?"

The Upanishads remind us of life's highest goal in beautiful words:

In the city of Brahman is a secret dwelling, the lotus of the heart. Within this dwelling is a space, and within this space is the fulfillment of our desires. What is within that space should be longed for and realized.

When people tell me some of their daring experiences, I want to use an American vernacular expression I am not usually prone to: "You ain't seen nothing yet!" Don't let yourself be excited by any of these tuppenny-ha'penny experiences. The final tri-

umph will come when God reveals himself in your consciousness, and this experience is repeated over and over again until at all times, with eyes open, you see the light of God on the mountain, on the sea, in the forest, in your home, in all people and all creatures. This is life's supreme purpose. Your love will be multiplied a million times; your joy will be multiplied a million times.

The Second Half of Life

Western culture is essentially youth-oriented. Everyone seems to wish that he or she could be young forever. To me, there is deep sadness in the idea that when our career goals have been achieved and our family responsibilities fulfilled, we are finally free to go after whatever youthful pursuits we might have missed out on earlier. This is going backwards on the path of spiritual evolution, which rises from the physical level of life to the mental level and then to the glorious awakening of spiritual awareness. This awakening is the great opportunity that awaits us in the second half of life.

In a biological sense, the processes of life and death proceed together from the moment we are conceived. Since birth we have been entered in a race with death. And sooner or later – from a strictly biological point of view, as early as age 25 – there comes a time when life begins slowly to lose ground. At that point, as far as biology goes, we enter the second half of life, a losing battle in which most of us hope for little more than to slow the advance of time.

But there is another sense of this phrase "the second half of life" which has little to do with age. In this view, the first half merely sets the stage for the drama we are born to play. This is the time for experimentation, when we play with life's toys – money, pleasure, power, possessions, prestige – and learn for ourselves what they are worth.

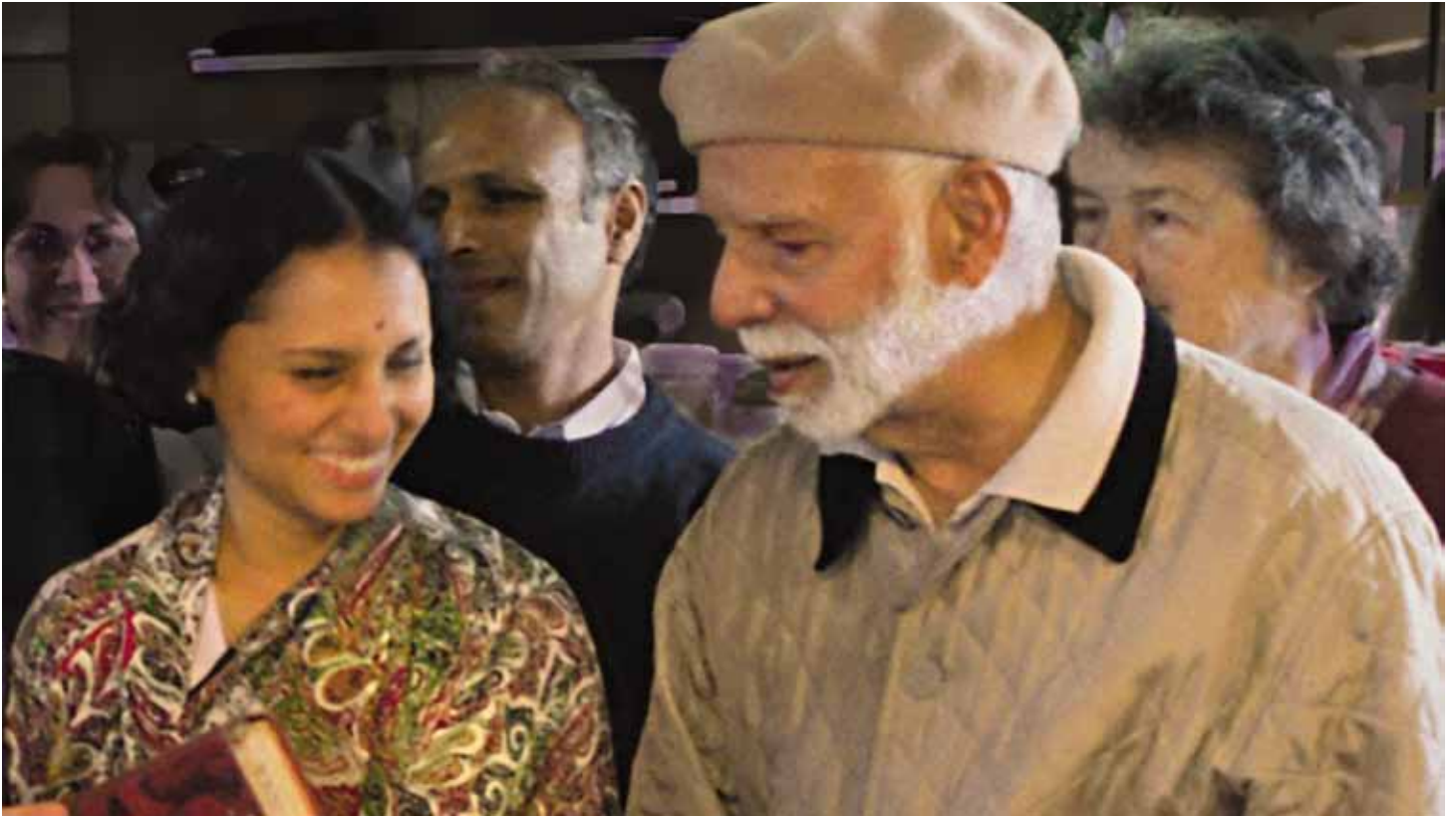
Many people never go beyond this phase. Nothing in modern civilization, with its cult of youth, encourages us to look farther. But it is only when we throw these toys away and begin to search for answers to life's most urgent questions – *Who am I? Why am I here? What is life for?* – that we really begin to live.

These are the years in which each of us is meant to grow to our full stature as a human being. They are the years for profound personal discoveries and great contributions that can be made only when one turns inward. For those who take up this challenge, life holds out unique promise: the fulfillment of living for a lofty goal, and of finally discovering within themselves a living presence that is beyond change and death.

I don't expect to dissuade young people from experimenting with sensory satisfactions and burning their fingers. Whatever eloquent assurances they hear about the second half of life, they are not likely to listen until they have had repeated opportunities to understand the fleeting nature of physical pleasure and personal profit. In all great mystical traditions there is a wide margin for this kind of experimentation allowed to the first half of life.

But when the inevitable decline of the body becomes a living experience, we should be ready to appreciate the lesson and benefit from what life is showing us firsthand. That is why it grieves me so much to see older people in this country who seem to have no purpose beyond clinging ever more tenaciously to physical phenomena.

The mystics are loving realists. They don't say, "Let me see your angel's wings"; they remind us that we all make mistakes in life, and that without making a reasonable amount of mistakes, most of us cannot learn to grow. None of us, therefore, need be depressed about our past or pres-



ent. On the path of meditation, even past mistakes can be made into powerful assets if we have learned something by making them. The purpose of difficult situations is to get us to master something in ourselves, and until we do this by facing such situations squarely, they will come to confront us again and again, more complicated and more distressing each time around.

The great Indian poet and dramatist Kalidasa has a beautiful verse that praises with poetry and precision those who have fulfilled each of the four stages of human life and at the end attained life's goal. According to this verse, the first stage – say, the first twenty-five years – is for learning: not just book-learning, but the arts of life and the skills of self-mastery. After that, for another twenty-five years or so, come the responsibilities of the householder – *vishaye 'sinam*, the pursuit of physical satisfactions. This rough division is thousands of years old, but even in my day, the usual age

of retirement for Indian professionals was 55, about the same as envisioned by our sages.

Today, of course, as longevity has improved, many men and women stay active in their jobs long past their fifties. But even if we prolong retirement till we are 65 or 70, it is good to treat the age of 60 as the point at which we enter the second half of life in the biological sense. One of the beautiful reminders of this in the Indian spiritual tradition says that when your son or daughter is up to your shoulder, it's time to start preparing for this great change. Then, to paraphrase Kalidasa, it becomes urgent to learn to live in wisdom: *muni vrittinam*, “to live like a sage”; that is, to start letting go of material things and personal attachments and learn to live not for ourselves and our family alone, but for all.

That is why, in India, the sixtieth birthday is a joyful celebration. Not the sixteenth, the sixtieth, because it is halfway. You have reached the

intermission. You can go out to the bar, take a break, and come back to resume the second half of life's drama, when the clues in the first half begin to come together and the plot begins to make sense.

Implicit in this celebration is the conviction of India's ancient sages that the normal span of human life is 120 years. This is a magnificent concept. According to them, to die at age 60 or 70 is to fall victim to a premature death. By this accounting – which does not, to my knowledge, contradict current biological theories of aging – we all have potential for health and longevity far beyond what is usually achieved. It has long been my contention that by following the simple rules of health and learning to train the mind, we can dramatically increase our chances for a long, active, happy, fulfilling life. And training the mind means gaining freedom from most of our earlier physical attractions, which drain our vitality and distract us from our

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purpose. We need to learn to exercise sense restraint, free ourselves from selfish attachments, and gain some measure of detachment from our private world so that we can find fulfillment in the happiness of a larger whole.

The English word *detachment* has a dreary sound. It suggests indifference. What is meant is really just the opposite: indifference to one's private pursuits and prepossessions for the sake of a tremendous expansion of consciousness, until our love embraces the whole of life.

A Time to Focus

The first half of life is a time of accumulation: acquiring knowledge, learning skills, gaining experience, raising a family, building a career. But in the second half, the experience of our earlier years should bring the wisdom to know what is important and the desire to concentrate on what matters most. And that always involves letting go: simplifying our lives, doing fewer things better, turning away from the thousand and one

activities with which all of us experiment in our younger years and which we have learned are, at best, blind alleys.

In this sense, the second half of life begins when we're ready to put aside the toys we have been playing with and focus our experience, vitality, and skills on what matters most. This has nothing to do with age; it means we're done playing: we have learned that what really matters is within us, and that every contribution we can make to life is enhanced if we turn inwards. Merely understanding this could transform our society, which is wasting the resources of millions of people in the second half of life with skills and resources the world needs.

Most of us are still active at this stage of life, perhaps even at the zenith of a career. We have experience, skills, and a measure of wisdom in our field. Simplifying and focusing our lives often releases even more energy and creativity. It isn't practical to learn detachment by retiring into a forest hermitage like those ancient

sages; we need to *work*. The secret is to work for a goal far loftier than ourselves, preferably with others, in a job that benefits society without compensation, reward, or even recognition.

To me, this means that the second half of life is a triumph. This is when life really begins: a time for creativity and fulfillment in giving back to life from our rich accumulation of experience, wisdom, and resources. When we continue to live for ourselves alone, we are depriving society of this precious legacy. It always pleases me to see so many of my friends giving back to life what they have gained: medical and legal professionals making second careers of community service, for example, or business people donating skills and resources to support nonprofit work such as ours. In fact, looking back, I can see with some surprise that this is what I did myself when I retired from education for degrees to begin my own second career: education for living.

Meditation is essential to making this kind of service a field for spiritual growth. The practice of meditation,

if done with full effort and sustained enthusiasm, cannot but result in detachment and the expansion of consciousness as the activity of the mind quiets down. But meditation alone is not enough; we must learn to implement this detachment in our daily lives. That is why selfless service – dedicating time for the benefit of others – benefits no one more than ourselves.

You can see how advanced our ancient sages were in this point of view. They recognized something not widely understood today: even with all the advances of medical science and technology, what does it matter to live a bit longer if we are not making a contribution to the rest of life?

Not Much Time

In many ways, youth postpones learning how to put first things first. We

tell ourselves we can settle down later. In this sense, entry into the second half of life is not marked by any external milestone like a birthday, but by a sea change in our way of thinking.

The Buddha repeats over and over again, “All that we are is the result of what we have thought.” Until we change our mode of thinking from selfish to selfless, from physical to spiritual, from obsession with ourselves to devotion to the welfare of others, there is no possibility of receiving the rich legacy of boundless love, unfailing wisdom, and scintillating health that is our birthright as human beings.

As a professor I must have seen students lose sight of their priorities a thousand times. When they should be doing their homework or preparing their papers, they discover they

have other urgent things they need to attend to: pizza places to visit, guitars to practice, dart skills to improve. Only when the time for finals comes does the question arise, “Why did I do all this? Why didn’t I do what needed to be done while I had the time?”

The most precious gift that meditation can confer is to protect us against this question, which will come to all of us, you know. For young and old alike, time passes all too swiftly, and none of us knows how much remains. One day or another, all of us are going to have to take our finals. Why not start preparing now? The richness of a new stage of life beckons us to explore the inner world of the spirit with the same fervor and gusto that we gave to our youthful exploits in the world of the senses. ☞



The Eight-Point Program in the Second Half of Life

By Eknath Easwaran

MOST PEOPLE look forward to retirement, when they are finally free to use their time as they choose. They don't have to punch a clock at 8:00, battle rush traffic, dress to someone else's standards, or work with people they don't like. They can sleep as late as they want and then lounge about in pajamas if it suits their fancy. They are free to play golf all day, learn a language, start that garden, read every page of the *Sunday Times* and catch up on all those back issues of *National Geographic* . . .

But there is a kind of person – I confess I am one – for whom just the thought of filling the rest of one's days like this is stressful, and “do what I want” throws up a red flag. When you have been working for years on reducing self-will and separateness, it is a challenge to be presented suddenly with every opportunity to indulge yourself. Every sensitive person, I think, knows this is a time to ask, “Then what *do* I really want? What is most important? This free time is a precious gift that won't be offered again. How can I make the very best use of it for what I value most?”

Sidebars: Comments from members of our online forums who are coping with the practice of meditation in the second half of life.



As I age I am aware of how much more precious time is. I find that I increasingly do not want to waste it. I have wasted enough. The urgency to grow in Truth and to help others seems more consuming and as that awareness grows so does my commitment to the practice of becoming all that I am. Little by little the dawn light brightens and reveals the fullness of the day.

☞

A good friend died recently. During his illness I heard Easwaran talk about how there isn't much time left to work on your sadhana if you're middle aged, because as we get older our energy lessens. He urged us to get serious now. This has helped me unify my desires and eliminate activities that aren't contributing to my spiritual development . . . I'm replacing them with things that contribute: singing hymns, mantram beach walks, and waking up early.

☞

My strong motivation is that I am feeling old. Time has flown and my mortality is plain to me. All things temporal so quickly pass. They cannot come with me on my journey beyond this life. Only the virtues inspired by my meditation help me truly and allow for seeing in a way that is less attached to ego needs and more focused on loving kindness and selfless service.

☞

But more important than fixing all the little problems in life is knowing that there is a lot more to the spiritual path than I've seen. It's not just about fixing things, about getting thin again. I've developed a spiritual ambition.

☞

Here the mystics of all religions have a very reassuring, practical answer. This is a time, they agree, when the body must decline, but the most precious things in life do not depend on the body at all. Love, wisdom, tenderness, compassion, and selfless service are all qualities that we can cultivate to the last moments of our life.

Meditation is the premier discipline for developing these inner treasures, and that is why I appeal to everyone over and over again, Put your meditation first. By “meditation,” of course, I mean the whole program I follow, all eight points. Together, these eight disciplines comprise a toolkit for making improvements every day in character, conduct, and consciousness – improvements that will not only make each day fresher and more fulfilling than the day before, but will also strengthen us against the gradual decline of physical abilities that goes hand in hand with aging.

Since practicing these eight points in the second half of life raises some new challenges, let me offer a few suggestions for making them the center of your day.

Meditation on a Passage

First and foremost, be very regular about your meditation: half an hour every morning, as early as possible, and half an hour again every evening, preferably just before going to bed – same time, same place, every day, weekdays and weekends. What you are doing is making your inner life more and more independent of the world of change, which means it is deeper, more resilient, and increasingly youthful, beyond the touch of time.

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I have been making an effort to focus my attention more and more clearly during meditation. If I am not really diligent it is disappointing because when that thirty minutes is gone, it's gone. If I lose focus I try to just get past it so that my focus returns. I'm not pleased with myself when my meditation doesn't go well.

⇒

Since I am single and retired, I have the luxury of personally arranging my hours however I choose. For several years I meditated only for thirty minutes in the morning. I started a second meditation time about two years ago. When I first started the evening meditation, I tried doing it at the end of the day, before going to bed, and found that I was just too tired by then. So, I tried meditating for 30 minutes before the beginning of my evening activities, at 4:00, and this works perfectly for me. I turn my phone off, read for awhile from Easwaran and then enjoy 30 minutes of quiet spiritual renewal and even mental and physical invigoration before entering into the activities of the evening.

⇒

I've found that I can meditate every day if and only if I do it first thing in the morning. In my case, this means getting up at 5:30 am so that I can ... have the next half hour to meditate before my husband wakes up and the dog needs to go out. My husband is talkative and it's next to impossible for me to meditate when he's awake – we live in a very small house and we're both retired so we're both home most of the time. So, 5:30 am it is. It's difficult, however, for me to drag my aging body out of bed at that hour! It's cold in winter in our house in the early mornings.

On the other hand, memorizing passages is surprisingly easy for me. I have been really pleased at this.

⇒

You can get more selfish in retirement. When you are living your own life, you can be exceedingly selfish and nobody but you knows. You can get very picky: “I really do prefer the right-hand side of the bus.” Sri Easwaran's path helps you stay more flexible and in that sense, younger.

⇒

At age 57, I began to meditate. In recent years, minor strokes have interfered with my ability to recall memorized passages. Now I keep the passages at hand and read them to myself when the memory fails. This way, I continue to learn.

⇒

Continued from previous page You may find as you age that concentration is more difficult. Do not neglect your meditation on that account, but give it your very best effort. Every time you meditate, you reduce your level of body-identification a little and fill your mind with your highest ideals.

In the practice of meditation, what you gradually learn to do is to stand further and further back from identification with the body. This actually enables the body to function better. You may not be able to run as fast or jump as far as when you were twenty, but you develop a grace that grows with the passage of time.

As you learn to turn your attention away from the body towards your real Self, when the body begins to lose its vitality, your security is not affected. Your personality is not diminished. You can become increasingly aware of the needs of others, and use the resources released in meditation to contribute to those around you simply for the joy of giving.

Repetition of a Mantram

The mantram becomes more and more important as the body ages. This is the time to use the mantram as much as possible, and not only when you are idle, anxious, or angry. Set aside blocks of time for it, just as you do with meditation, and make it a vital part of every day. Combining the mantram with a long, brisk daily walk is ideal, for walking is one of the best and safest forms of exercise and benefits all parts of the body including the brain. Use idle moments to write the mantram; you can carry a little notebook for this purpose in your pocket or purse. Write the mantram again before retiring for bed; then learn to fall asleep in it.

I'm in my seventies. Society says to someone my age, "You're not valued any more. You're standing in the middle of the fast track, slowing things down." Now people are living into their seventies, eighties, nineties. But we tell older people, "Go have a lot of fun." . . .

In the meditation passage "The City of Brahman," it says you have to know who you are and what you truly desire. This culture throws up a barrier to that. It wants you to be a consumer, a person who will buy a new car every year. This program gives you an opportunity to be your real Self, with a capital "S."



This program just calls you out. It calls out the idealism you've had for so long and haven't found a place for. My teaching years I thought were calling out my best, but I wasn't working at such a deep level. . . . There is so much warehousing, so much disinterest in older people. No one is challenging us. [This] program challenges us. I think we only become petty and small and mean-spirited when we're not challenged to be our best.



I'm working very much with a meditation passage from the Bhagavad Gita, "The Self dwells in the house of the body." I'm having trouble with memorization, but it's bringing me so much consolation. Why are some meditation passages easier to memorize? I think the ones that are hard are the ones that I really need.



Slowing Down & One-Pointed Attention

As always, these two disciplines go hand in hand. They too acquire fresh significance in the second half of life, partly because free time encourages the mind to wander even when we don't realize it – even if we feel busier than ever because we are trying to fill our days with things to do. Remember that there is no such thing as an unimportant thought or action. Time passes moment by moment, and each moment shapes consciousness, so be particularly careful to do one thing at a time with full attention, even if it seems trivial, and not let your mind get divided or speeded up. (As you might guess, this becomes important for safety too!)

Training the Senses

The purpose of meditation is to purify consciousness, replacing junk thoughts with lofty ideals. It is impossible to overemphasize how important it is in the second half of life not to add more to the deleterious stuff that has already gone into the mind through the senses.

One of the best ways to do this is simply to turn off the TV, which more and more research is linking to the deterioration of mental status as we age. In addition, all the mass media contribute to stereotypes about aging that slip into our consciousness unnoticed, which studies indicate has a negative effect on our image of ourselves. Meditation on passages from the scriptures and mystics replaces this image of ourselves as aging physical creatures with the loftiest self-image possible, reminding us that our real Self is beyond time, old age, and death.



Like many “retired” persons, I seem to be busier than when I was in the workforce, often going through the activities of the day almost nonstop. To ease this extreme busy-ness, I have tried something new this week that seems to work well for me and activates at least four of the eight points. Before I start on a new major activity of the day, I sit down for five minutes and repeat the mantram and perhaps a portion of one of my passages, concentrating on just relaxing for five minutes. Then, feeling refreshed, I begin a new activity.

These five-minute breaks work beautifully to slow me down. (I suppose that a five-minute mantram walk would serve the same purpose, and I intend to try that in the coming week.)

↳

I have been trying for a long time to be less attached to things, get rid of things in my life and simplify. But I just sink back so easily into old buying habits, it makes me think of St Augustine saying “I fall back by my own weight.” The lines of a passage [from the Katha Upanishad], especially the last two, have helped me so much. When I find myself wanting to buy something, the phrase “which makes mankind forget the goal of life” pops up and the object of my attraction suddenly seems so unattractive!

↳

Putting Others First

Taking our minds off ourselves, too, becomes more and more critical as we age, with the body clamoring for attention and so much more freedom for self-indulgence. One of the most effective and rewarding ways to expand our consciousness beyond ourselves, as I learned from my teacher, my grandmother, is by putting those around us first.

This can be more challenging after retirement because there are often fewer people in our lives. That is one of several good reasons to find places outside the home where you can apply your hard-earned skills and experience to improving the welfare of others. It is helpful to do this with others when possible, even if you have differences. You may remember my saying over and over that from a spiritual perspective, the purpose of work is the purification of character: reducing self-will and rubbing off the angles and corners of personality that keep us separate from others and lock us up in our own private ego-prison.

I read that the number of people who live alone in this country is growing rapidly. It's a very disturbing sign. I am of the opinion that it is much better to be with difficult people than to be alone. It is by living and working with others in harmony that we learn to respect differences and gradually dissolve the sense of separateness that makes one feel isolated and unwanted.



My husband recently retired from full-time work to a half-time position. While this is a wonderful time in our lives, this change meant that my daily schedule also changed. Let me say that the Eight Point Program has been of enormous help for me during this transition. I can really relate to the "Little Way" of Saint Therese, as I have found that having more time with my husband requires more patience and flexibility on both our parts, providing many more opportunities to practice Putting Others First. If I find myself getting agitated or impatient I try to remember to repeat my mantram and to remember the principle of Slowing Down.

I love Saint Therese's quote: "Never miss an opportunity. For if you only knew the value Jesus sets on even the tiniest act of self-denial, you would grasp at every opportunity like a miser going after treasure." Keeping this in mind this past week – it is amazing how many opportunities have been presented to put this into action! And, remembering this principle, I found I was a better listener, and even if the topic was of little interest to me, I watched my husband's interest in the topic and how much he enjoyed it and I listened with my complete attention.

⇒

The disciplines and practices have prepared me for life's difficulties. Well into the 3rd year of my husband's aggressive cancer surgery and treatments, he continues to have medical problems and frequent hospitalizations. In the "old days," I would handle my stress with cigarettes and booze. Now my trained senses know that is NOT the way to go. With the 8PP, I can manage. And, rather than wallow in the self-pity of my retirement years being nothing like I expected them to be, I can better understand and put to use the prayer of St. Francis. The program has been a life-saver for me.

⇒

Spiritual Fellowship & Spiritual Reading

These two disciplines too are closely related to what goes into our consciousness. At any age, what we think is highly susceptible to the influence of those around us, but in the second half of life it is particularly easy to spend time idly with people whose talk and tastes detract from the higher image we are trying to cultivate.

Choose your company carefully and, if you possibly can, come to a Blue Mountain Center retreat.

Finally, the second half of life is the perfect time to cultivate the company of saints and sages of scriptures of all religions, to strengthen your faith in your highest ideals and bring them to life in your character, conduct, and consciousness.

“All that we are,” the Buddha says, “is the result of what we have thought.” In all these ways, you can use each day to fill your mind with purifying thoughts, building an inner life that will shine brighter and brighter as the physical body declines. ⇨

Easwaran talks about most of us with strong likes and dislikes developing [a nervous system with] “one-way traffic” as we move very strongly towards pleasure and away from pain. I am a compulsive overeater and this one-way traffic is very pronounced in me, so Easwaran’s teachings are encounters with that teacher within that make me realize how powerful and destructive this self-will can be. It has gotten my attention again and I have tried living the 8P program instead of just studying it on a daily basis, but at my age the momentum of my self-will is substantial.

⇨

As I’ve gotten older and thought about forgiving others, I often realize that most injuries are imagined – a matter of perception. Seldom do others make a conscious effort to hurt us. It’s a battle of egos. Once you realize [that] a door of understanding opens and it is difficult to perceive others as those who “trespass against us.” When that happens you begin to take more responsibility for your reactions and put your energy into changing them.

⇨

I have been doing more spiritual reading since I retired 4 months ago. I have a new schedule which includes at least 30 minutes a day for spiritual reading, and often when I need a rest mid-afternoon, I will lie down and read for another 15–20 minutes. This has greatly helped increase my devotion and enthusiasm for the practice overall, and my devotion to deepening my meditation immensely! ⇨



Are you interested in learning passage meditation and seeing the benefits of the practice in your own life? Explore these resources to get you started . . .



A Free Online Course In this course, Easwaran will teach you directly – through his videotaped talks – just as he taught the generations of students before you. A friendly written narrative guides you through his talks and writings. Four sections to follow in your own time, each about one hour long. Free of charge; no sign-up required. Visit www.easwaran.org/learn.

Free Presentations These presentations provide an introduction to the practice and benefits of passage meditation. You will leave with an understanding of the benefits of passage meditation, a taste of the meditation style itself, and information about free resources for exploring this practice further, without any expectations or obligations. No preparation is needed, and you can just show up on the day. Held in various locations. Visit www.easwaran.org/presentations or call us at 800 475 2369.

Retreats throughout the US Our retreat curriculum reaches great depths while giving you all the information and inspiration you need to start a passage meditation practice successfully.

The balanced schedule allows time for reflection, discussion with others, and learning how you can apply passage meditation to your own challenges and aspirations. You can participate in the discussions as much or as little as suits you.

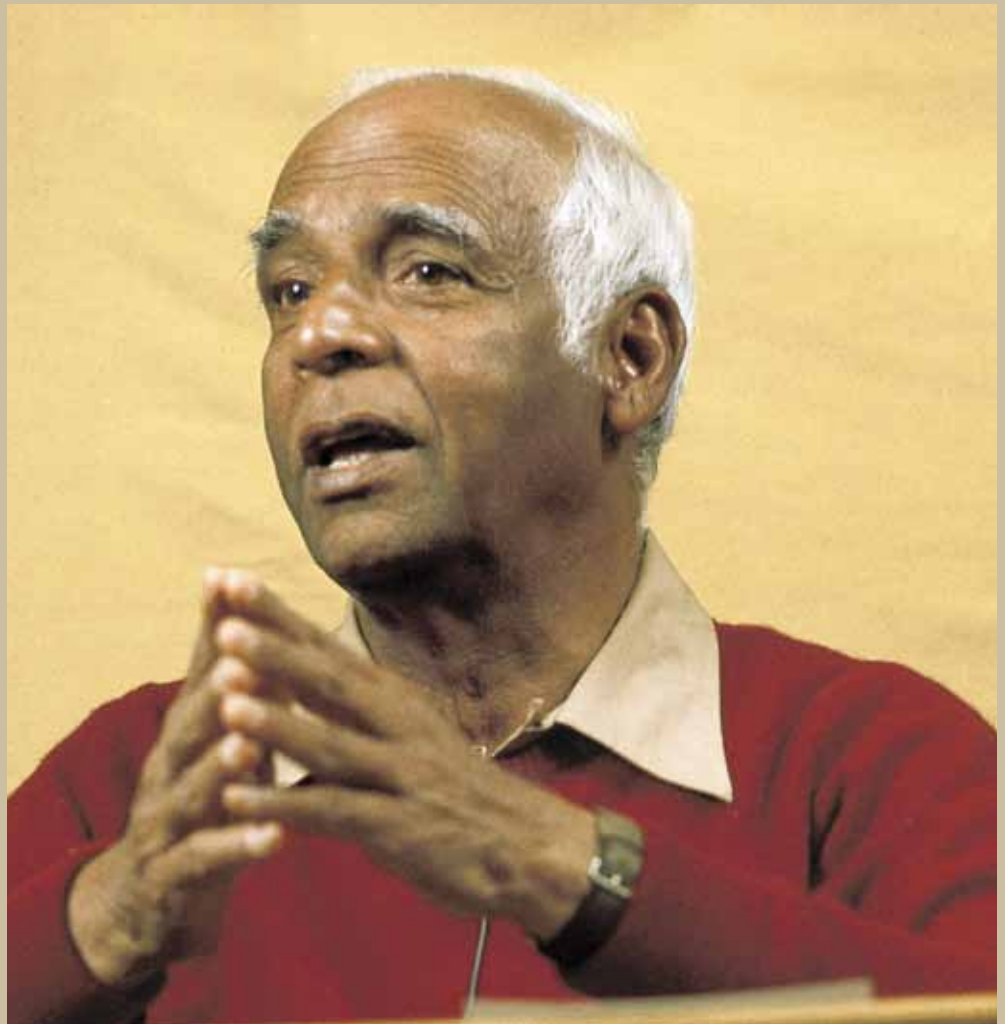
Visit www.easwaran.org/retreats or call us at 800 475 2369 A sliding scale fee structure and financial aid are available.

“I recently attended a beginning weekend retreat at Tomales. It is not like me to say things like this, but I believe it was life-changing for me. There are many forms of meditation, but this one really resonates for me. And I particularly appreciate that there are so many practical ways that Easwaran addresses issues of daily living. I very much look forward to continuing the practice and making it a part of my life.” (Judy P, from a 2012 introductory weekend retreat.)

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Over the years Easwaran readers have told us how much they have enjoyed listening to his recordings of passages from the 1991 edition of *God Makes the Rivers to Flow*. Easwaran's reading is sonorous and deep, slowing down the mind and drawing us into a world of timeless wisdom where our worries and concerns fall into perspective.

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Uplifting and lyrical, sometimes startlingly practical, these inspirational passages all express the same unifying truth: that we are spiritual beings, with limitless resources of love, energy, and wisdom, intended to make our contribution to our communities and our world.

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Sacred Literature of the World

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In Tomales, California

*September 21–23: Returnee Weekend
Sept. 29–10/5: In-Depth Weeklong [FULL]
October 13–19: In-Depth Weeklong
Nov. 2–4: Young Adult (18–35) Weekend
November 9–11: Introductory Weekend
November 30–12/2: Returnee Weekend*

2013

*February 2–8: In-Depth Weeklong
Feb. 15–17: Young Adult (18–35) Weekend
March 8–10: Introductory Weekend
March 15–19: Senior Half-Week
March 22–24: Returnee Weekend*

Across the US

*September 8: San Diego One-Day
September 29: Chicago One-Day
September 28–30: Chicago Weekend
November 10: Sacramento (Auburn) One-Day*

2013

*January 19: Petaluma One-Day
February 2: Dallas One-Day
February 1–3: Dallas Weekend
February 9: Los Angeles (Encino) One-Day
April 13: Oregon (Mt. Angel) One-Day
April 12–14: Oregon (Mt. Angel) Weekend*