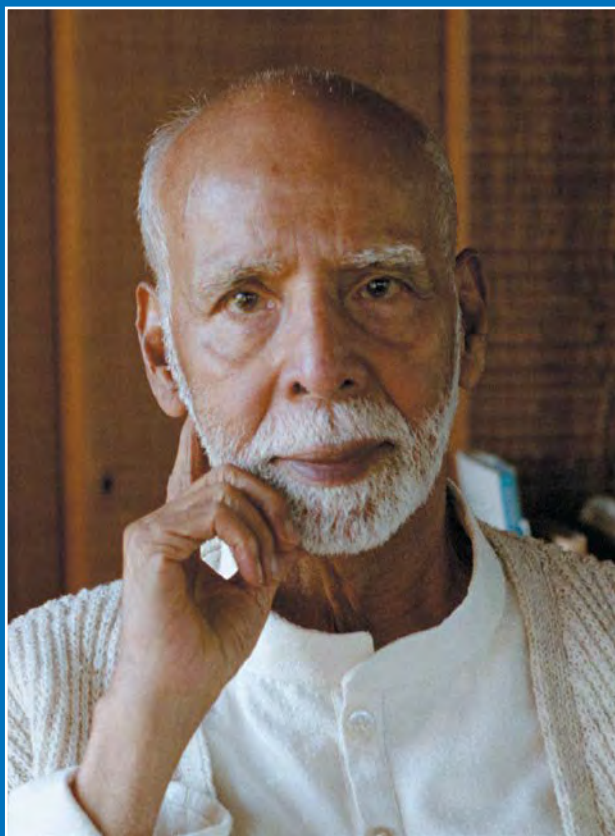


Ekknath Easwaran and Christine Easwaran
on Meditation and Spiritual Living

Blue Mountain Journal

SPECIAL ISSUE | WINTER 2018



Our Response in Troubled Times

In This Issue



In this special issue of the *Blue Mountain Journal*, in a year when many friends have been asking the BMCM for guidance, we are sharing Easwaran's message of hope.

Two decades ago, he told us, "People look around with fear and suspicion in their hearts, and they

see a world to be afraid of, a world of danger. I see a world of choices, a world of hope."

Easwaran's teachings are timeless. We have the same choices today – it's up to us to make the right ones. We know in our hearts what they are, but, faced with the growing violence, confusion, and alienation in our society, we need Easwaran to gently remind us.

We suggest this is a journal you will want to keep – to read and re-read whenever you feel angry, frightened, or overwhelmed. You'll find inspiration and practical advice in two articles from Easwaran, two short pieces that Christine Easwaran wrote after 9/11, and a new, previously unpublished passage for meditation.

First, here is Easwaran's response to the question many of us are asking: What should we be doing to help the world?

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The *Blue Mountain Journal* is a publication of The Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, a California 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1961 by Eknath Easwaran to carry on his work.

Easwaran answers:

“In the Sanskrit scriptures this world in which we live – of birth and death, good and evil, right and wrong, unity and disunity – is called *karmabhumi*, the land of karma, the land of work. When you feel oppressed by the burden of the world and the tragedies enacted on it, please remind yourself that it is only here, where we find the choice between the best and the worst, that the human being can discover the unity of life. Strangely, it is in this utter darkness that we begin to grope for light; it is in the midst of utter violence that we begin to yearn for love.

“I keep in close touch with what happens in the world. And there are times when I feel deeply grieved by the suffering I read about, and I wonder why life has to be this way. But I never despair. At those times I go deep, deep into meditation until I reach the very source of love and wisdom that exists in each of us. When I do, I am reassured that all is well.

“This is not merely some sentimental notion. I return from this awareness charged with the energy and vision I need to continue to alleviate this suffering.

“So what I would tell all of you is this: meditate every day, throw yourself into some form of selfless work, and use your sense of suffering as a powerful motivation to help relieve the suffering of others.

“It is a wonderful gift to give.”

May this issue help us all to make the small but significant changes in our lives that can bring peace and unity to our world.

– Sue Craig and the BMCM Editorial Team



Easwaran and Christine, 1970s.

From the Depths of Our Heart

Christine Easwaran

The Blue Mountain Center of Meditation has often been asked, What would Gandhi do at this time? What would our founder, Sri Easwaran, do?

I have pondered these questions and I must admit that we have no way of knowing. But I do believe if we open our hearts to the wisdom of great souls, they will inspire our words and actions.

So when I asked myself what I should do, I came up with another question: Do I really think I must *do* something? Aren't my thoughts and prayers more powerful than my actions? Then I began to wonder how many of us earnestly praying for peace and good will for all people everywhere would be needed to turn civilization from its self-destructive course.

Both science and religion work on the principle that intangible, unseen forces permeate and unite all things in the universe. All religions proclaim that there is a divine spark in everyone without which civilization would not have survived. When we pray from the depths of our heart, we tap forces greater than ourselves, a realm of experience in which all of us are one.

Whether you believe in prayer or not, I urge everyone who reads this to give it a try.

Pray for yourself, your family, your community, your country, your planet.

Pray for the earth and all creatures that live.

Pray for food, shelter, clothing, and the simple amenities of life for all people.

Pray for freedom from fear, anger, and greed for everyone everywhere.

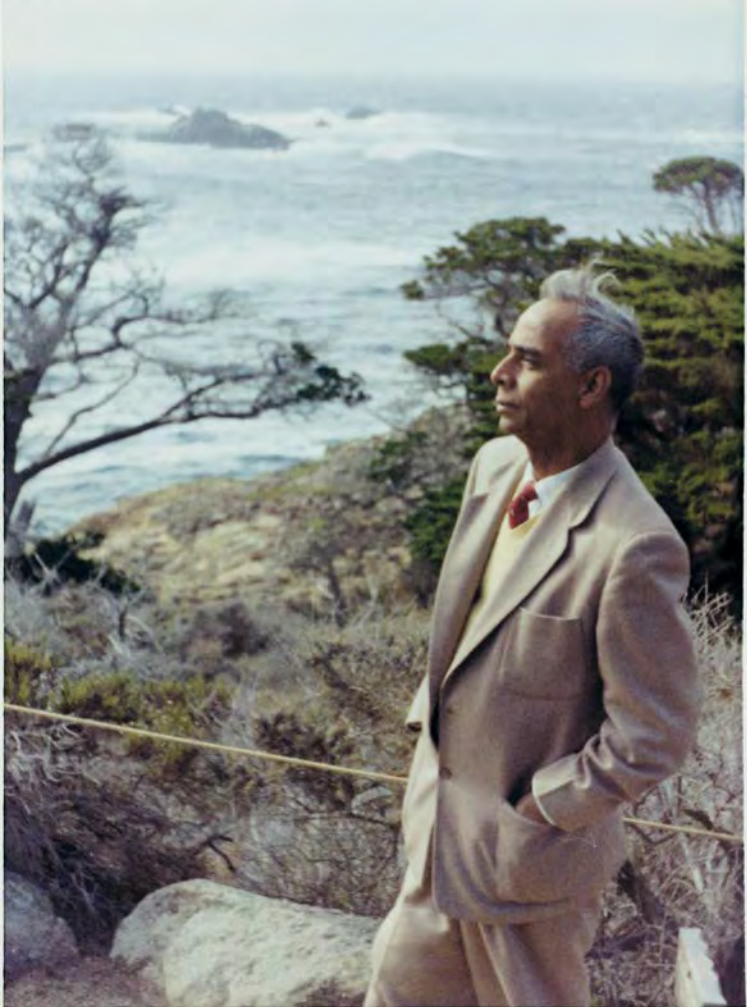
Pray for leaders of all countries and faiths.

Pray for your enemies – as did Jesus, Muhammad, and all great spiritual leaders.

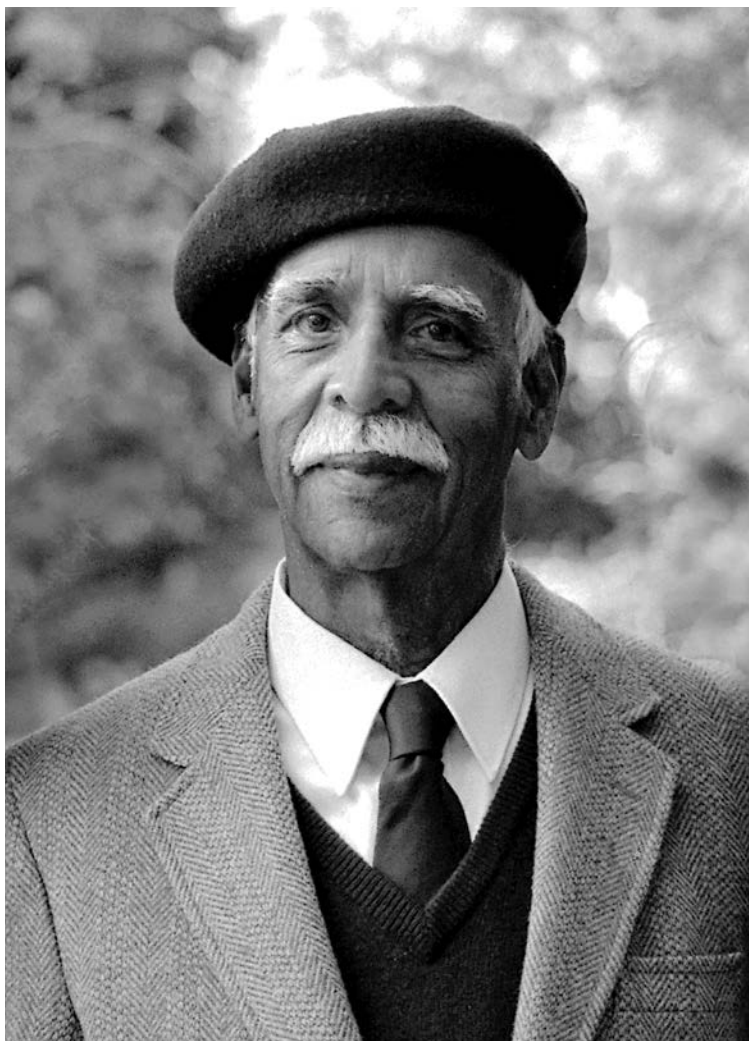
Pray for all men, women, and children everywhere to lay down their defenses and to look to one another with trust.

Pray for loving kindness, good will, respect, generosity, and hope to prevail.

Pray for peace on earth. 🌸



Easwaran, 1960s.



Easwaran, 1980s.

The Candle of the Lord

Ekknath Easwaran

In India the times we live in are called Kali Yuga, the “Age of Darkness” – or, as I translate it, the Age of Anger. With the world torn asunder by war and violence invading our cities and even our homes and schools, uncontrolled anger has become the hallmark of daily life. It saturates our media, our entertainment, our personal relationships, even our speech.

Since 1961, when I began this work, I have witnessed a steady decline in the quality of life throughout the modern world as anger and violence become taken for granted as part of life. This is a trend that threatens everyone, for anger in one corner of the globe now can find expression thousands of miles away. With the technology of destruction within easy reach, one person full of hatred can wreak havoc and terror anywhere.

All of us harbor a good deal of anger, if not on the surface, then deep in consciousness. That is our human condition. But an angry person can never help lead an angry world from darkness into light – a responsibility that each of us needs to assume now if we want a safer world.

Lighting the candle

In my first weeks in this country I was taken to the Truman Museum in Independence, Missouri. There I saw an ancient clay lamp that had been presented to President Truman by the Jewish community of Boston. At its base was an inscription that is often translated, “The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord.”

How this candle is to be lit has been described by lovers of God in every major religion. The principles they agree

on are very simple. The entire phenomenal world has as its basis a changeless reality which is present in the depths of consciousness in every one of us. It follows that each of us – not only saints – can discover this changeless reality through spiritual disciplines, the foremost of which is meditation or interior prayer.

I have to confess I have very little interest in theology, metaphysics, or philosophy. I consider myself a very ordinary, down-to-earth man who likes what Americans call “do it yourself.” My approach to the scriptures is entirely on this basis: that they are practical manuals to the art of living, and the truths in them can be verified by anyone prepared to undergo the necessary disciplines.

Still your mind

These disciplines need to be able to take us far beyond the senses, the intellect, and the mind, which are but finite instruments. Even logic tells us that a finite instrument cannot be used for fathoming the infinite. We need a higher mode of knowing. As a psalm in the Book of Common Prayer says beautifully, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

The Bhagavad Gita describes how this higher mode of knowing can be developed. “Still your mind completely,” the Lord tells us, “and you will be united with me here and now.” His disciple Arjuna, who represents you and me, objects, “It’s easier to control the wind than the mind!” And the Lord replies, “There is a simple secret: regular, systematic, steadfast daily practice.”

The clay lamps used in ancient Jerusalem are still common in village India. People pour in a little coconut oil, insert a wick, light it, and keep the lamp on the window sill on festive

days. When the lamp is placed outside, the flame flickers wildly and may even go out whenever a breeze blows. But when the lamp is inside the home, in an alcove or shrine, the tongue of flame is absolutely still; it does not flicker at all.

Like a steady flame

In deep meditation, the Gita says, when you are concentrating on the prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi, your mind should be like the flame of a lamp in a windless place – it should not even flicker. It should be completely on the words of the prayer – which means, in practical terms, that you are slowly becoming like Saint Francis in your daily character and conduct.

When the mind does not flicker, there can be no fear. When the mind does not flicker, there can be no anger. All negative emotions are wild movements in the mind that vanish when the mind is still. This is a state that all of us can reach through the grace of the Lord by using the great prayer of Saint Francis: “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.”

Meditation develops the most precious capacity a human being can have: the capacity to turn anger into compassion, fear into fearlessness, and hatred into love. This is the greatest miracle of meditation – not seeing visions, not hearing voices, but the capacity to purify the heart of all that is selfish, violent, and degrading. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Light in the darkness

“For thou wilt light my candle,” says a Psalm of David: “The Lord, my God, will enlighten my darkness.” To anyone in whom this candle is lit, spiritual leadership comes – entirely through the grace of God.

In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord promises that he will rescue the world whenever righteousness declines and violence threatens to overpower us. Traditionally this is understood as divine incarnation. But it applies equally to the miracle of transformation, when some personal crisis turns an apparently ordinary person like Mohandas Gandhi or Francis Bernadone into a beacon figure who lights a path back from the brink of self-destruction.

In Indian mythology, this recurring saga is dramatized vividly. When the suffering of the world becomes unbearable, it is said, Mother Earth herself goes to the Lord and throws herself at his feet in an appeal for help. The Lord responds by coming to life in a human being whose consciousness is ready for service as an instrument of peace.

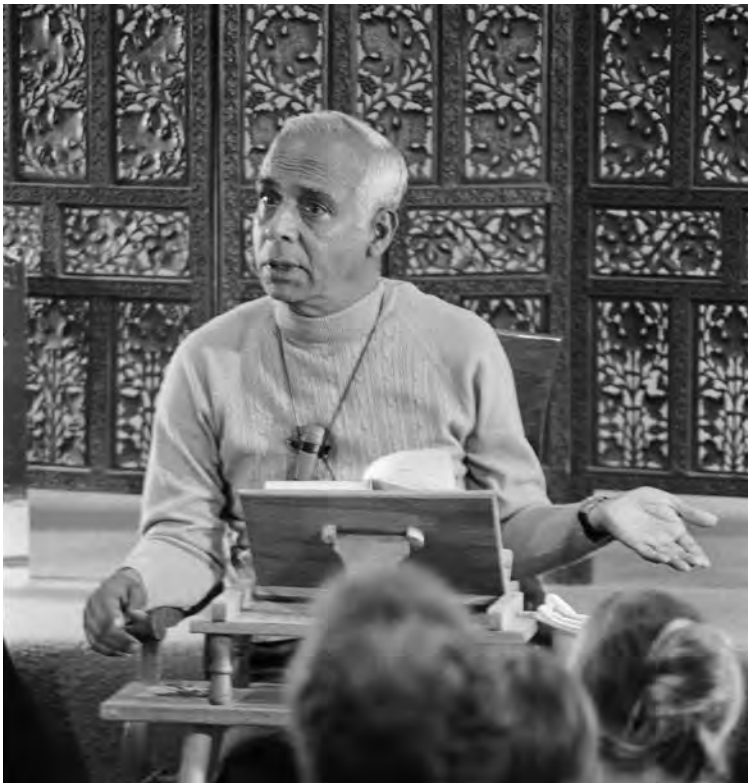
In my interpretation, the Lord's promise to come to our rescue can be understood in a third way too. Little people like you and me may not be a Gandhi, a Saint Francis, or a Saint Teresa, but if we do everything we can to still our mind and subdue our self-will, the Lord can light the lamp of wisdom within so that we, too, can contribute a little light instead of adding to the darkness of our times.

Prayer from the depths

In any human being, a profound personal crisis can open a channel into the depths of the unconscious.

I would hazard the guess that this is what happens in cases of serious addiction, when life becomes so unbearable that an ordinary man or woman suddenly finds the strength to reverse the deep-seated self-destructive habits of a lifetime.

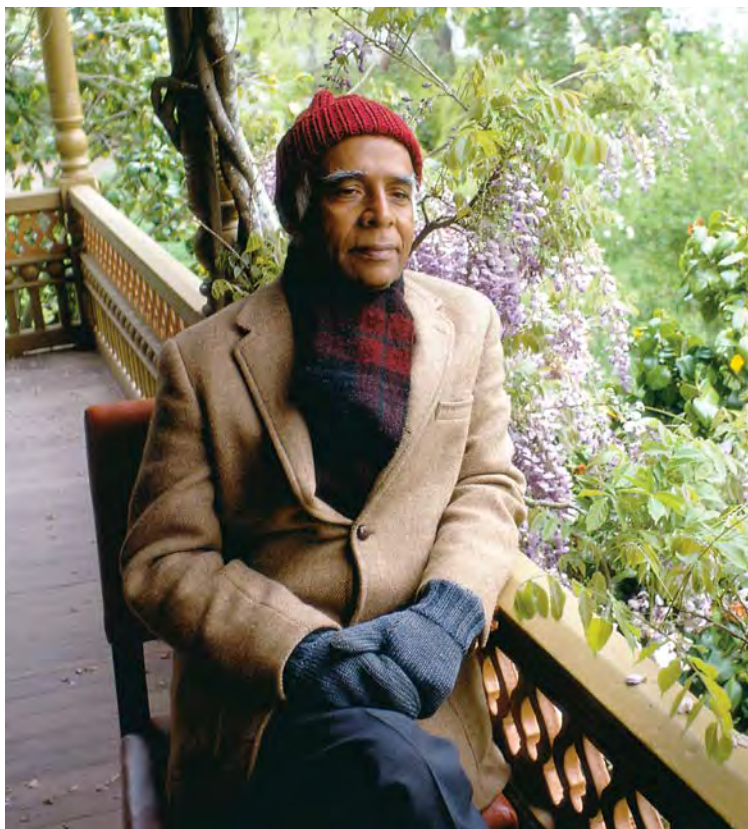
We see the same miraculous transformation on a grander scale in the lives of many great saints. In spiritual terms, this



Easwaran giving class, 1970s.

is the Lord within responding to a wholehearted appeal from the very depths of the heart.

Spiritual psychology would explain the myth of the Lord coming to the rescue of Mother Earth in a very similar way. When the world is sick to the heart with violence, that revolution opens a channel deep into the collective unconscious, the race-old consciousness of our common humanity. Little people



Easwaran, 1970s.

all over begin to find the will to make deep changes in their lives to fulfill that longing for peace. Then, when a beacon figure comes to show a way out – Jesus or the Buddha, Moses or Muhammad, Gandhi or Saint Francis – the ground is ready. Our hearts are open for them to teach.

The prayer of Mother Earth in this myth is the collective cry

of countless ordinary people like you and me around the world. Prayer from the heart really means prayer from the depths of the unconscious – not oral prayer, but prayer without words. When prayer arises from the depths of the unconscious like this, tremendous forces – life forces that operate beneath our fragmented, superficial, egocentric awareness – are touched and moved and brought into action. These eternal laws, which are as operative as the law of gravity, open their doors to those who have no personal irons in the fire, who do not seek any profit or prestige but depend entirely upon the Lord.

Faith burns brightly

Gandhi tells us from his own bitterly-tested personal experience that there is no prayer from the heart that will not be answered. But the Lord will answer it, he says, not on our terms – that is the heartbreak – but on his. We cannot see more than a small corner of the vast stage of the human drama, on which consequences already set in motion have to be played out. But always, at the eleventh hour, rescue comes.

“My faith is brightest,” Gandhi says, “in the midst of impenetrable darkness.” I can assure you that Gandhi knew intimately what it was like to stand in darkness and alone. This is how faith is tested. When everything looks dark, when there is no silver lining on the horizon and the earth is pitch black from pole to pole, faith will burn brightly. That is the kind of faith that Gandhi had, that my grandmother had. With that kind of faith, prayer of the heart can bring into operation those eternal laws which ensure that good prevails and evil disappears.

May the Lord of Love grant us all that faith which can never be put out by any storm that blows. 🌸

You Are a Force for Peace

Christine Easwaran

Great teachers in every religion and every age have told us that goodness is as much a part of life as the force of gravity. The world would not endure for a single day without it.

Somerset Maugham echoes this great truth in his enormously popular novel *The Razor's Edge*, published in 1943 in the midst of World War II. Referring to the story's main character, Maugham said, "Goodness is the strongest force in the world, and Larry has got it."

Larry is a young American whose experience of war prompts a long search for meaning. By the end of the novel, his life is completely changed; but he has no philosophy to teach, only the desire to lead an ordinary life ennobled by what he has learned. A friend challenges him: "Can you for a moment imagine that you, one man, can have any effect?"

One ripple can cause another

"I can try," Larry replies. "Nothing that happens is without effect. If you throw a stone in a pond the universe isn't quite the same as it was before ... It may be that if I live the life I've planned for myself it may affect others; the effect may be no greater than the ripple caused by a stone thrown in a pond, but one ripple causes another, and that one a third; it's just possible that a few people will see that my way of life offers happiness and peace, and that they in turn will teach what they have learnt to others."



Easwaran and Christine, 1960s.

Each of us can be a peacemaker

We should never underestimate the effect of one person remaining calm in the midst of turmoil, the power of one person to change ill will into good will, anger into compassion, hatred into love.

I do earnestly believe that the greatest danger that faces us today is fear and hatred. In words that belong to the whole world, the Prayer of Saint Francis tells how each of us can be a peacemaker in his or her own circle – an island for those around us, a force for peace, a shield against fear and anger.

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

You are a force for peace

The first step is to bring calm to your own mind so you don't add fuel to the flames of fear and anger around you. Keep the Prayer of Saint Francis in front of you. Put it on your desk. Don't let it become stale. Write it out. Memorize it. Repeat it to yourself whenever you feel overwhelmed. Give it to your friends. Keep it in your wallet. Teach it to your children. Recite it out loud. Put it on your refrigerator door.

You are a force for peace

Don't get caught in angry, frightened talk. Choose what goes into your mind; don't leave it to the media. Don't let hostility and resentment take over your life. Step away from the whirlpools of negativity that swirl around us.

You are a force for peace

Do something positive – every day. Take control of your life. Get together with your family and friends. Read elevating spiritual literature. Read with your children.

You are a force for peace

Slow down. Stay focused. Pay attention to the needs of the people around you. Be kind and considerate. At home and at work, help create an atmosphere of trust and openness. Reach out to those you feel have offended you.

You are a force for peace

Choose a mantram (see page 31). Repeat it silently to yourself whenever you can – while washing the dishes, while waiting in line. Repeat it whenever you start to get angry, upset, or afraid. Combine it often with a good, fast walk. Fall asleep repeating it so it stays with you throughout the night. Write it out by hand – fill a page or two with it every day. Write it for the whole world. Keep a little book for that purpose and carry it with you everywhere.

You are a force for peace

Teach your mantram to your children. Get them to repeat it whenever they can. Tell them it chases fears away. Show them how powerful it is by using it with them to keep calm. Tell them they too are a force for peace and the mantram can be their shield.

Keep reminding yourself that goodness is the strongest force in the world. 🌸



Easwaran, 1980s.

The Power of Practical Nonviolence

Eknath Easwaran

South India is full of snakes, and every year as I was growing up, when the earth was warm after the monsoon rains, I used to marvel at the sloughed-off snakeskins scattered across our fields.

“Doesn’t it hurt a snake to shed its skin like that?” I once asked my grandmother. “It has no choice,” she replied. “It will strangle if it can’t grow. It has to slough its skin or die.”

In the same way, I would say, civilization outgrows the skins of old ways that begin to strangle it. If they are not discarded, they become so constricting that civilization begins to turn on itself and become self-destructive.

In the last fifty years, we have come to a crisis in human evolution where we have to choose between violence and nonviolence. If we choose to tread the path of violence, not only do we impede our evolution but we invite destruction upon all of us.

The forces in our minds

The mystics assure us that there is a vital connection between the violence or nonviolence in our minds and the conditions that exist outside. Although good people around the globe today are deeply concerned about taking the external steps – political, economic, and social – necessary to promote peace, we must search deeper if we want a real solution.

If we look at the question of violence through the Sermon

on the Mount or the Bhagavad Gita, another largely ignored dimension appears: the mind. If we acknowledge this dimension, we can hope to do away with war; if we continue to ignore it, no external measure can be of lasting help.

In order to do effective peace work, in order to bring about real peace between all countries and all races, there has to be peace in our mind and love in our heart. If we pursue peace with anger or animosity, nothing can be stirred up but conflict.

We are so physically oriented, so externally oriented, that we cannot understand that what we do with our hands is an expression of the forces in our minds. Even our technology is an expression of some of our deepest desires. The predicament of our technology, which could create the conditions of paradise on this earth and yet threatens to destroy it, only reflects the deeper spiritual division in our hearts.

Spiritual practices unite

The political and economic philosophies on which our modern systems have been based are breaking down. We can see how little we are aware of the unity of life, and how little political bonds are able to hold people together.

But spiritual bonds do hold people together. Spiritual practices like meditation and repetition of the mantram can unite people for all time.

Meditation is a tool. Anyone can use it for releasing tremendous inner resources, and these resources cannot help flowing into loving service. The kind of action taken will vary from person to person. The job of meditation is simply to release the resources, and wherever they are released, in whatever field, they throw light on how pressing human problems can be solved.

Start in our own home

We can start to make our contribution right in our own city – beginning, like Mahatma Gandhi, in our own home.

Here I can make a few practical suggestions. A nonviolent home is a home that eschews violence in every form: not only in action, which is absolutely necessary, but also in word and even thought. A home that is nonviolent in thought, word, and deed is governed entirely by love. You can see why Gandhi said that civilization itself depends upon nonviolence. Such a home is the very cornerstone of a civilized society.

We have to correct domestic disharmony before we start trying to set right the disharmony in the community. Training in the bosom of the family, learning to be able to forget our petty little interests in promoting the general welfare, is what prepares us to play our part as citizens in promoting the welfare of our community, our country, and our world.

This secret applies everywhere, from home and community to national and international relations. It is when we contribute to the greatest good of the whole that we benefit most. If we can keep our eyes always on the welfare of the whole, we shall find that even if we sometimes have to make small concessions in the give-and-take of daily life, everyone benefits permanently.

Healing divisions

One of the first lessons Gandhi learned in South Africa was that everywhere, the secret of peace lies in healing divisions – first between individuals, then between groups and communities, eventually within countries and even between nations. As we grow spiritually, opportunities for this service will open for us, just as they did with Gandhi.



Easwaran and Christine, 1960s.

To change course like this, we human beings have to learn to talk to each other even when our opinions differ. No problem is insoluble if we are prepared to sit down and listen respectfully to what the other person has to say. I think many of our troubles, from personal quarrels to global conflicts, can be attributed to our inability to put aside resentments about the past and focus with clarity and common sense on the problem at hand.

In bringing people together like this, it is essential to learn to practice the words of Jesus: “Bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you.” We have to practice this at home before we can carry it into our community and our place of work. Whenever you are irritated, instead of breaking off communication or retaliating, that is the time to repeat the mantram, respond with patience, and keep communication open.

Give up fault-finding

“Judge not,” Jesus warns, “that ye be not judged.” When we keep pointing a finger of judgment at others, we are teaching our mind a lasting habit of condemnation. Sooner or later, that finger of judgment will be aimed point-blank at ourselves. It is not that people do not sometimes warrant judgment; fault is very easy to find. But judgmental attitudes and a suspicious eye only poison a situation. To right wrongs and help others correct their faults, we have to focus on what is positive and never give in to negative thinking.

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

This does not mean playing Pollyanna or closing our eyes to wrong behavior. It means simply that we will never lose faith in any person’s capacity to change. Without that faith, people lose faith in themselves, and without faith in yourself it is not possible to improve. Everyone deserves our respect, for all are

children of an all-compassionate God. This is the most effective way to help others remember their true character.

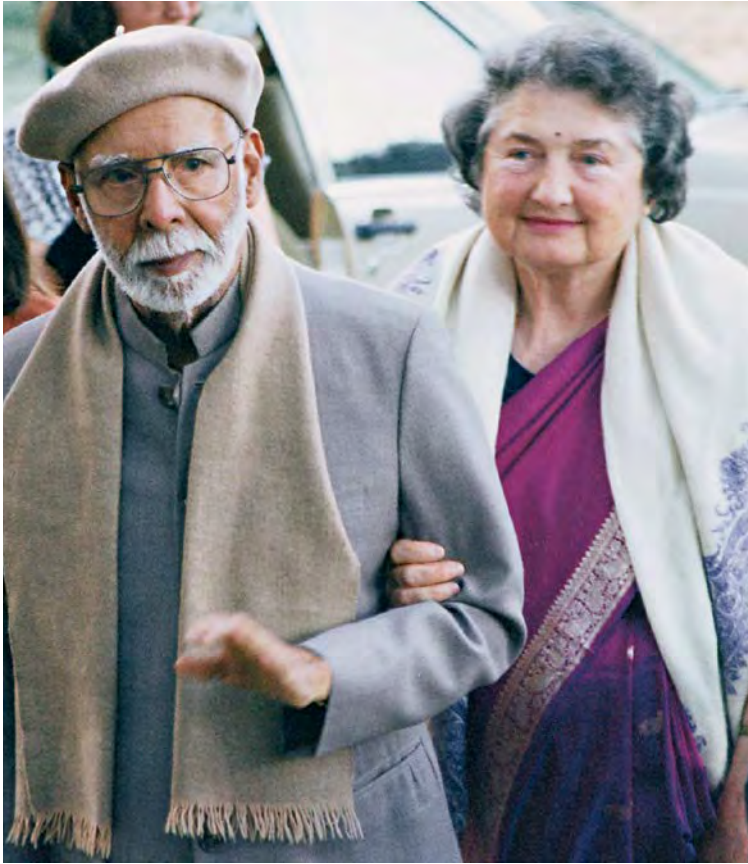
It is an astonishing truth: there is only one person in the world I can hope to control, and that is myself. I may learn to govern the way I think, but I can never govern the way *you* think. I can only change myself: but in doing that, I do influence how you act, too. There is no other way to help a person change.

A climate of peace

To be completely nonviolent we have to draw upon the peace and security that lie in the depths of our heart. The daily practice of meditation enables us to draw upon this immense power so that we can return love for hatred even under the most unfavorable conditions. If each of us, through the example of our own lives, can inspire two more people every year to meditate and to live in peace with those around them, it will have an incalculably great effect in creating a climate of peace.

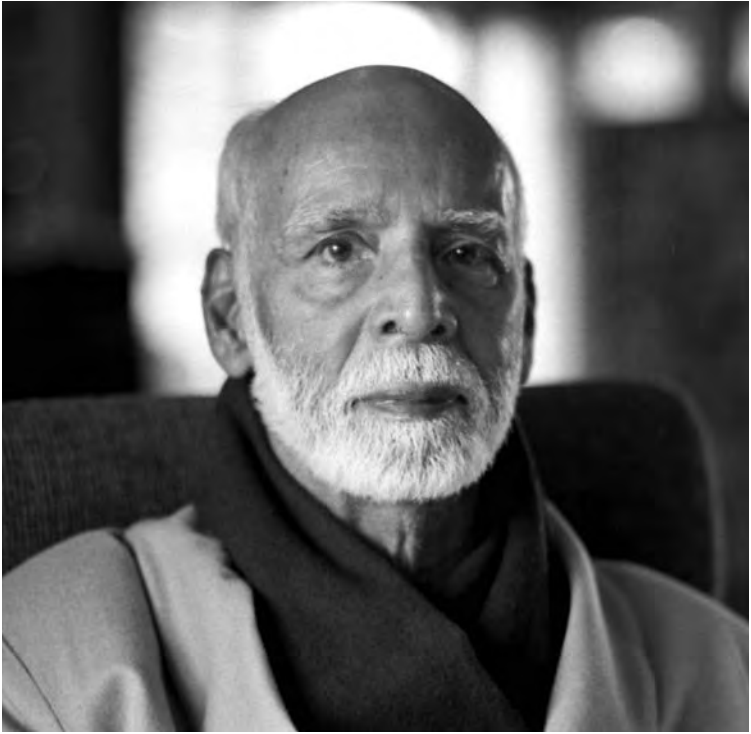
In your own city, if a few hundred people establish peace within themselves and learn to return good for evil, love for hatred, the whole city will take on this climate. Such a city has an influence far beyond its borders. Any place free from violence becomes a beacon because this is what people everywhere are yearning for. Your city can influence the whole country – and one country's example, particularly today, can influence the whole world.

We should not expect a civilization to change as easily as a snake sheds its skin. Progress is won slowly, over centuries. Remember that old, constricting habits are not shed by governments or institutions. They are shed by individuals – ordinary people like you and me who go on to influence others.



Easwaran and Christine, 1990s.

It is we, the ordinary people of the world, who have the power to change our lives. We make history together, all of us, by the sum of our choices and desires. 🌸



Easwaran, 1990s.

A Universal Prayer

Eknath Easwaran

I have a new suggestion for all of you: to begin your meditation with a universal prayer. The world is in such a poor condition that this is probably one of the worst crises we have had in the history of humanity. It is in such times that God responds to the heartfelt prayer of devotees.

Here is my free rendering of some ancient Sanskrit verses that can be used for meditation:

I offer to the Supreme Being

My deeds, my words, my thoughts.

May everyone reach the Supreme Goal.

May everyone strive for the good of all.

May noble thoughts fill the minds of all.

May joy fill the hearts of all.

May selfish people become selfless.

May selfless people become illumined.

May illumined people go beyond death.

And may they help others to go beyond death.



Meditation on a Passage

Choose a time for meditation when you can sit for half an hour in uninterrupted quiet. Early morning is best, before the activities of the day begin.

- Select a place that is cool, clean, and quiet.
- Sit with your back and head erect, on the floor or on a straight-backed chair. A back support may be helpful.
- Close your eyes and begin to go slowly, in your mind, through the words of a simple, positive, inspirational passage from one of the world's great spiritual traditions.
- While meditating, do not follow any association of ideas or allow your mind to reflect on the meaning of the words. If you are giving your full attention to each word, the meaning cannot help sinking in.
- When distractions come, do not resist them, but give more attention to the words of the passage.
- When you reach the end of the passage, you may use it again as necessary to complete your period of meditation until you have memorized others.
- Resolve to have your meditation every day – however full your schedule, whatever interruptions threaten, whether you are sick or well.

**Find more about passage meditation
at www.bmcm.org/learn.**

Choosing a Mantram

Choose a mantram established by long tradition. Select one from this list or visit our website (see below). Every faith tradition has a mantram, often more than one. You don't have to subscribe to any religion to benefit from the mantram, however. You simply have to be willing to try it. Choose whichever mantram appeals to you.

- Christian tradition: the name of Jesus and the Jesus Prayer – “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us” – are ancient mantrams. Catholics also use *Hail Mary* or *Ave Maria*.
- Jewish tradition: *Barukh attah Adonai* (“Blessed art thou, O Lord”) or *Ribono shel olam* (“O Lord of the universe”).
- Muslim tradition: the name of Allah or *Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim* (“In the name of God, Merciful, Compassionate”).
- Buddhist tradition: *Om mani padme hum*, referring to the “jewel in the lotus” of the heart.
- Hindu tradition: One of the oldest and most popular mantrams is the one used by Mahatma Gandhi: *Rama, Rama* – a name for God meaning the source of joy within.

If no other mantram on the list appeals to you, *Rama* is simple, powerful, and carries no negative associations. You can never go wrong with *Rama*.

Find more mantrams recommended by Easwaran and FAQs at www.bmcm.org/learn/mantram.



Meditate every day, throw yourself into some form of selfless work, and use your sense of suffering as a powerful motivation to help relieve the suffering of others. It is a wonderful gift to give.

— *Eknath Easwaran*



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