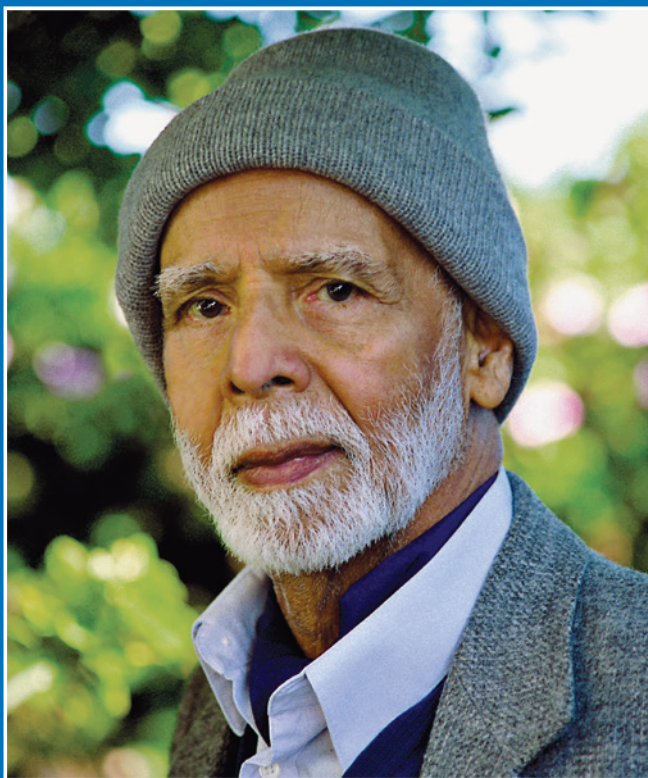


Eknath Easwaran on Meditation & Spiritual Living

# Blue Mountain Journal

WINTER 2023



## Detachment

Learning to Live in Freedom

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## In This Issue

We're returning to a classic theme in this issue. Easwaran's teachings often highlight the critical importance of detachment: to maintain good health, to make meaningful contributions in the world, to develop loving relationships, to progress on the spiritual path. This may feel counterintuitive but Easwaran notes: "We do not get detached from others; that is insensitivity. We get detached from ourselves, from our own ego, by gaining control over the thoughts with which we respond to life around us."

In the first article of this issue, Easwaran explains that by developing detachment through meditation and the allied disciplines, we can eject unwelcome negative thoughts, making room for the thoughts we desire:

"Love, for example, is our nature. In a sense we do not have to make ourselves loving; we have only to remove the thoughts that keep love from taking its proper place. This is why I say detachment gives you the capacity to love everybody."

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In the second article, Easwaran shows how detachment can be used to solve personal problems:

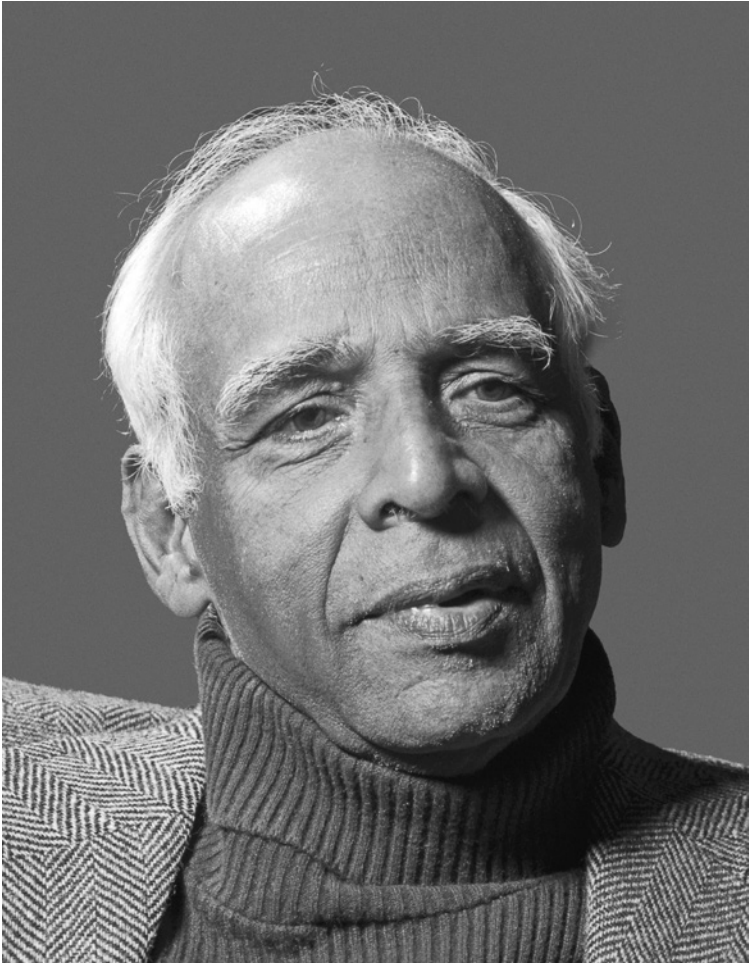
“The flow of thoughts depends surprisingly little on what goes on outside us. And the implication is marvelous: we do not need to change our environment to solve personal problems; all we have to do is master our thinking process and change our response to the environment.”

In the third article, Easwaran describes “the art of withdrawing desire from lesser things, letting them fall away, so as to harness their power to reach the heights of what a human being can attain.” As he observes:

“By opening a window onto a fuller, loftier view of life than that dictated by self-interest, detachment brings a sense of purpose. Without a reason for living, the human being withers and dies inside. However paradoxical it may sound, it is detachment that enables us to give ourselves wholeheartedly to worthwhile work without ever getting depressed, despondent, or burned out – right into the last days of our lives.”

This issue also includes tips from Easwaran and stories from the BMCM community. We hope this journal inspires you to cultivate the precious capacity of detachment, to enrich your life and the lives of those around you.

– The BMCM Editorial team



Easwaran, 1970s

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# The Ticket Inspector

Eknath Easwaran, from *Climbing the Blue Mountain*

The orbit in which our minds travel lies well outside the realm of words. It encompasses regions populated by those elusive things we call thoughts, which come and go like the faintest of shadows. Yet though they are often too elusive to hold and identify, thoughts leave indelible traces on our lives. For this reason, getting hold of the mind is a strategic undertaking, fraught with difficulties and startling discoveries but well worth the effort.

## A crowded train station

Often we can grasp the workings of the mind more easily by drawing a parallel with some more tangible thing. A couple of days ago it struck me that the mind has a great deal in common with a crowded train station. New York has Grand Central Station; in India I am most familiar with Madras Central, well down on the southeastern coast. Madras Central is vast. As soon as you enter the upper deck you see two huge boards, ARRIVALS and DEPARTURES. From that vantage point you can look on as thousands of travelers descend to the terminal floor to board trains for many parts of India and points beyond.

The Grand Trunk Express runs to Delhi, the nation's capital, a distance of over a thousand miles. The Calcutta Mail travels the length of India's eastern coast. The Bombay Mail cuts across the heart of the subcontinent; the Rameshwaram Express goes

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to the southern tip. The Bangalore Mail travels west to Mysore, and the Malabar Express goes to my native state of Kerala on the western coast. And I must not omit the Blue Mountain Express, which travels to Mettupalayam at the foot of the Nilgiris or Blue Mountain, where I later made my home. With all these expresses and many more local trains, called shuttles or passengers, Madras Central is quite a busy junction.

### Arrivals and departures every moment

The scene in the mind is very much like this. When you descend below the surface level of consciousness, it is almost as if you see the same two big boards: ARRIVALS and DEPARTURES. On the arriving trains come physical cravings, messages from sense stimuli, annoyances from the environment; every train is full to capacity. At the far end, the departing trains are full of responses. This too is a very busy junction; arrivals and departures are scheduled every moment.

Why is the schedule of arrivals so full? Because we have taken great pains to lay down incoming sense-ways in highly regular routes. Stimulation from food, for instance – regular or meter gauge – arrives every couple of hours; thoughts of sex, mostly broad gauge, arrive on a moment's notice. Quite a number of minor sensations too try to hitch rides on the trains that ply these tracks. And most often they succeed, for the engineers rather enjoy making unscheduled stops.

If this is our situation, there is no reason to blame ourselves. Most of us have become conditioned to heavy sense traffic

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throughout our present life, and perhaps, according to Hinduism and Buddhism, for thousands and thousands of years. The routes have become fixed. Electronic signals have been installed to speed sensations along, so that as soon as a car is put on the tracks, it goes. Everything is automated; there is no longer any need for an engineer. As soon as our day begins, all the traffic in the direction of what we are pleasantly used to is routed right in, and the rest is conveniently sidetracked. That is why it is so difficult for us to exercise any serious control over our thoughts.

### Traveling third class

Trains in India offer three classes of service. First class is for the affluent. Second is used primarily by professional people. Third class, for the most part, is occupied by simple village folk. Mahatma Gandhi always traveled third class, even though the government tried to provide him with private carriages, because he wanted to identify himself completely with the masses of Indian people he was serving. When a reporter asked him why he insisted on traveling third class, he replied with his characteristic toothless smile, “Because there is no fourth.”

Similarly, whenever I talk about railway travel in India, I am talking about travel third class. It is in the third-class car that you really get the sense of fellowship that makes trains so enjoyable. You not only get to see beautiful scenery, you get camaraderie too.

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## An animated scene

When you purchase a ticket at Madras Central, you go past a little gate to have it punched by an inspector. Then you enter your carriage and take your seat. Third-class carriages are crowded; even the luggage racks are sometimes occupied by human beings. From what I have observed, sleeping in a luggage rack requires a fine sense of balance, and the capacity to wake up at a moment's warning if you catch yourself starting to fall. To add to the merriment, sometimes a wedding party of twenty or thirty will enter the carriage and begin celebrating right there and then. All in all, third class is an animated scene.

Indians are a talkative people. As soon as you sit down, someone is likely to ask, "Where are you from?"

You say, "L.A."

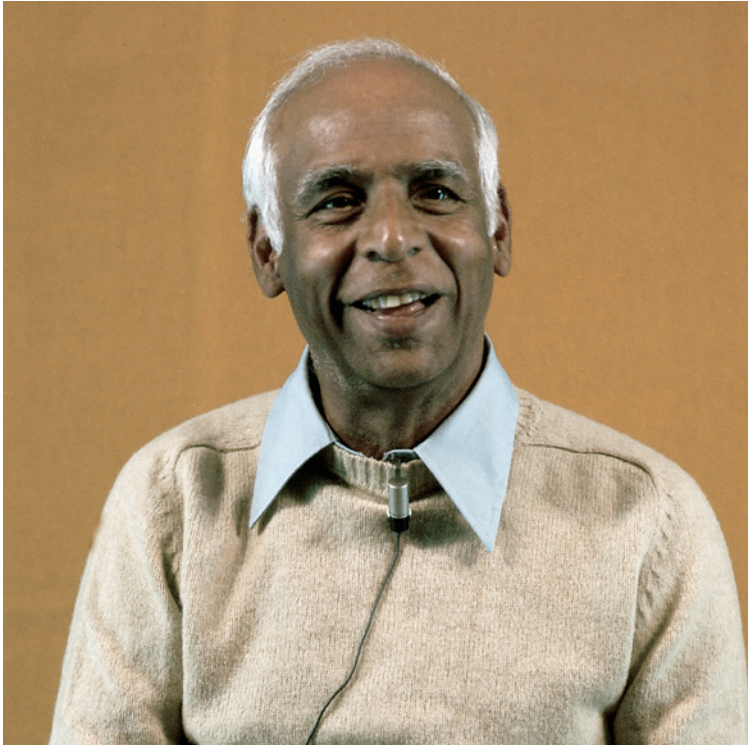
"How many brothers and sisters do you have?"

This may seem a little personal, but you don't want to be unfriendly. "Two brothers and one sister."

"What is your salary?"

Here most foreigners get taken aback. From what they have read in travel columns, they are afraid someone is going to bite their ear or demand half a month's pay. But the questioner is not really prying into personal affairs; this kind of exchange is part of being friendly. "Nobody in Pinole has asked me this question in the entire twenty years I've lived there," you may say to yourself. Maybe few people have cared enough to ask. Besides, if you do not care to reveal that you earn only six hundred dollars a month, you can answer, "Two hundred





Easwaran, 1970s

dollars a day.” It does not matter; these are just well-meant attempts to make conversation.

Then, before the train pulls out, vendors come up to the windows. Their cries of “*Chaya, kappi, chaya, kappi*” – “Tea, coffee, tea, coffee” – fill the air. They also bring around a kind of Indian pretzel that is even more pretzely than those I have tried in this country. Tea and these pretzels is a combination

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few can resist; even if they are not hungry, most people feel tempted to have some. Finally, at long last, the guard gives the signal that the train is about to depart.

In the days when I traveled on Indian trains, it sometimes seemed that more people traveled without tickets than with. This was not only understandable, it made for a very interesting situation. Once the train started to move, all kinds of people began coming in – from the luggage racks, out of the restrooms.

Often they managed to occupy seats intended for ticketholders. More and more of them would squeeze onto the benches, with the result that there was not room for everybody to sit. At such times I would quietly get up and stand in a corner. I had an accommodating nature, and I decided that if these people wanted my place, even though I held a ticket, who was I to say no? I didn't really mind standing.

But then one or two of these free travelers would start singing. They seldom had trained voices or a classical repertoire, and when they went around afterwards to ask for contributions, I thought people paid partly for services rendered and partly to get them to stop. Even to my accommodating mind, this was pushing things too far.

### The ticket inspector

Fortunately, the trains employed an interesting figure called the ticket inspector. His job was to go around systematically and check each passenger's ticket. One student does not have a ticket at all; another, also ticketless, tries to elude the

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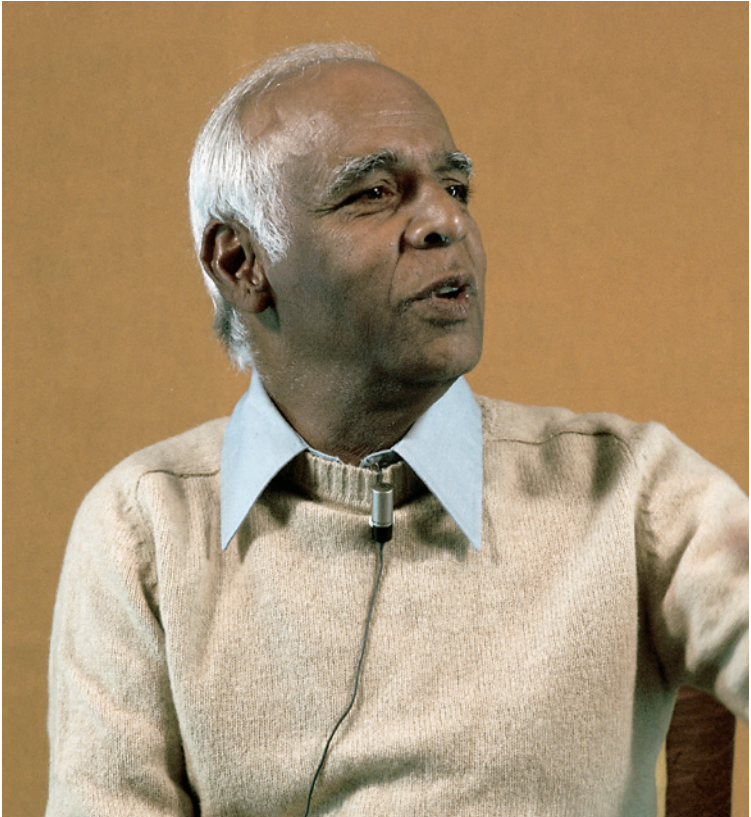
inspector's watchful eye and fails. Then it turns out that a third fellow's ticket expired several stations back. So the inspector says, "At the next station, you three leave." It is done politely, gently, with a parting "God bless you," but at the next stop all three are ejected.

We run into much the same situation with our departing thoughts. Good will has a ticket. Compassion, forgiveness, love, wisdom, are all qualified travelers with lifetime passes. But ill will, jealousy, impatience, greed, and resentment have no tickets. They should never be allowed on our trains. The only problem is that we do not know what to do about them. A train of thought starts out all in order, with our blessing. But as soon as it gets out of sight of the station, all sorts of odd characters appear on the scene. We can hardly believe some of the things they lead us to say and do. They occupy the most prominent seats and raise such a racket that we sometimes suspect we have no legitimate passengers at all.

### Take negative thoughts to the door

Meditation functions much like a ticket inspector, polite but very firm. While Mr. Greed is sitting in the front row taking in the view, our inspector comes and asks for his ticket. If Greed hasn't got a ticket – and it never can – the inspector says pointedly, "We are about to make an unscheduled stop. There is the door, invitingly open." If Mr. Greed does not take the hint, he will give a friendly push to "speed the parting guest."

We can all learn to do this. When negative thoughts come, we can take them to the door in meditation without getting



Easwaran, 1970s

the least bit agitated and tell them firmly, “Please go.” This is a tremendous feat, tremendous in its difficulty as well as in its implications. But all great spiritual teachers tell us, “We have learned this; you can learn to do it too.”

When we face a difficult situation, contemporary psychology tells us that we have two choices: fight or flight. Here I beg

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to differ. We may not exercise it, we may not even know of it, but we have a third alternative: to put ticketless travelers off the train. Then the ticket inspector can give their seats to thoughts we desire: understanding, patience, equanimity, good will. Instead of reacting against others, we can choose how we respond. When someone is hostile, we can listen patiently and answer honestly without going on the attack or the defense.

### Detachment and good health

The Bhagavad Gita calls this precious capacity detachment. The term is widely misunderstood. We do not get detached from others; that is insensitivity. We get detached from ourselves, from our own ego, by gaining control over the thoughts with which we respond to life around us.

If this is essential to spiritual awareness, it is equally essential even for physical health. When you get angry at somebody, for example, your arteries are constricted. This is not a result of getting angry or a characteristic of getting angry; constricted arteries are part of what getting angry means. Therefore your blood pressure rises, and your heart has to work harder; these are part of anger too.

When you are young, of course, after the spasm of anger is over, arteries and heart come back to normal. But when you get angry or hostile many times, as most of us do in today's high-pressure world, the heart suffers. Heart muscles need a continuous supply of blood. They suffer slow starvation when arteries are constricted or blocked up, and critical problems ensue. A good deal of this damage is caused by our not knowing

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how to stay detached and therefore patient – in other words, by not knowing how to keep ticketless travelers like anger off the trains.

### The capacity to love everybody

We can be kind, patient, and selfless on a sustained basis only if we cultivate detachment. And just as anger and resentment can damage the arteries in the long run, I would hazard the guess that sustained kindness, patience, and selflessness can protect against and even reverse arterial disease. Two brilliant San Francisco cardiologists, Drs. Friedman and Rosenman, say in so many words that in serious cardiovascular problems, the outcome depends not so much on what the doctor is able to do for the patient as on what the patient is able to do for himself. All of us can do a great deal to improve our health by keeping our mind on an even keel; that is what detachment means.

I would even go so far as to say, on the basis of what I myself have experienced, that we can reverse any negative tendency in our personality by refusing to let negative thoughts have their way. This is a far-reaching statement, for it means that positive thoughts are already on board the train. All we have to do is make sure their places are not usurped. Love, for example, is our nature. In a sense we do not have to make ourselves loving; we have only to remove the thoughts that keep love from taking its proper place. This is why I say detachment gives you the capacity to love everybody. When you can regulate your thoughts, you do not simply react to people; your relationships are of your own choice.

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When I was a boy, if a friend got angry with me, my spiritual teacher used to ask, “So what? What reason do you have for getting angry with him? What is the connection?” I heard this from her lips so many times that I began to apply it. Nowadays when somebody confides in me, “He’s angry with you!” I say, “So what? Let him be angry; I can forgive.” It helps me and him alike. If I can even take a few steps closer to him, our friendship will become that much surer.

Many people, after trying this, come to me later on and exclaim, “I never imagined it was so hard!” Nothing is harder. Whoever tells you that detachment is “as easy as drinking water,” as we say in my mother tongue, knows very little about the mind. Nothing is more difficult; nothing calls for greater daring. But once people understand what detachment can do for them, they clamor for the glory of the spiritual life. Then previous exploits look like fireflies on a sunny day.

### Every thought counts

There is another compelling reason for learning to control thoughts: our thoughts actually shape our lives. We just cannot get rid of them. Every thought we think leaves an indelible impression on our consciousness. That is why none of us can afford not to be vigilant when it comes to the mind. Every thought counts. Each angry thought we think contributes to our becoming the type who may fly into a rage at the slightest provocation – just as each kind thought we think contributes to our becoming the type who can be kind in the face of the fiercest provocation.

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Here the expression “train of thought” is apt. Even on the neurological level, I think, a thought may be said to run along a track laid down in the mind, from stimulus to response. Someone gets angry with us and the train steams out of the station, picking up angry thoughts all along the line. When it reaches its destination, everyone piles out and delivers a lot of vituperative words. There is no freedom in this; the train mechanically follows the track of our conditioning.

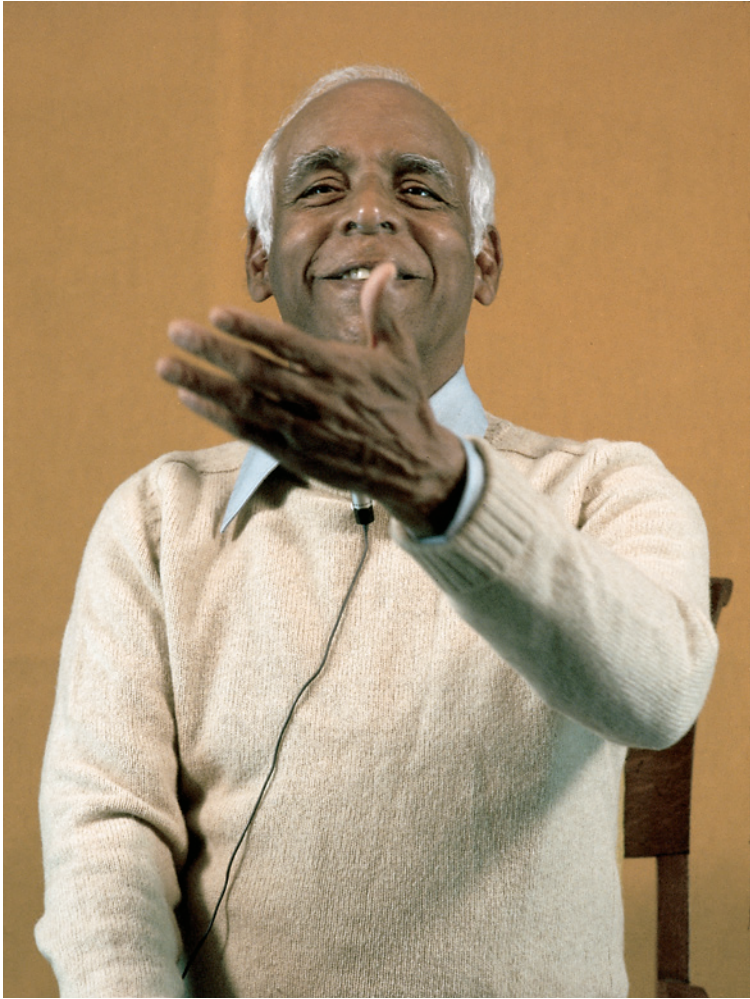
### Slow the mind down

If it went more slowly, we would see that the connections it makes as it speeds along are not fixed or predetermined. We have many unsuspected switches leading to different, kinder responses. But they are frozen from disuse, and we are traveling too fast to see them. If we tried to take these switches while the mind is rushing, we might derail the train.

First the mind must be slowed down, which is one of the aims of meditation. Then, gradually, we start urging our thoughts down tracks never taken before – new ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving, which for a while may go against all our previous conditioning.

Going with conditioning is easy. A conditioned train of thought has all the momentum of a freight train rolling downhill; you just put it on the track at the top and it rushes to its lowest level without effort. Going against the conditioning of a strong *samskara* feels like trying to push the whole train uphill by yourself. But you are not without help. In India, when a train has to climb to hill stations like those on the Blue





Easwaran, 1970s

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Mountain where my mother and I lived, six or seven thousand feet high, an additional engine is attached at the rear to push. Meditation and its related disciplines are like this extra engine.

While the mind is complaining, “I don’t like this! I can’t do that!” and the body is registering a varied list of psychosomatic complaints, a powerful engine is being hooked on the back. Slowly it begins to push us up over what we have conditioned ourselves to dislike in a person, until we can see him or her in a detached light. Interestingly enough, the light of detachment is not cold. When all self-interest is removed from our seeing, we look on everyone with love.

### The power of the mantram

Indian trains have various signs put up for the passengers’ information. One I used to see in every car announced SEATS FORTY – though usually a student would long since have removed the first s. Similarly, each car had a chain with a prominent red sign: TO STOP THE TRAIN, PULL THE CHAIN.

Wherever saints and sages have traveled, they have left us such a chain: the mantram. Every day we can tug on it a little to slow down the pace of our rampaging thoughts. For years this will be a mechanical repetition. But as our dedication to the spiritual life deepens, our use of the mantram will begin to have power behind it, the power of deepening devotion to the Lord. In an emergency, those few words will express all the need for support, strength, and comfort we have.

Isn’t there a film called *The Great Train Robbery*? Mystics tell us about the Great Train Stopper. For many years, to draw

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on my own experience, I have been repeating the mantram my grandmother gave me with a tenacity that most people cannot imagine. I made use of every possible moment, because I wanted so deeply to bring my thoughts under my control. Gradually I was able to slow down the furious rush of the mind until it would take whatever switches I chose.

### A sweet silence

If it started out toward resentment, I could switch it over to compassion. If it began with fear, I could switch to fearlessness. And finally I experienced for the first time the stopping these sages talk about. I could not believe that such a sweet silence was real. The clack-clack-clacking of the mind came to a halt; the tumult of the vendors and ticketless travelers died away. All that remained was an utter, rejuvenating silence. That is what stilling the mind is all about.

In the countryside near where I live there used to be a flourishing railway, largely for the use of the lumber industry. Now industry is elsewhere, and nothing remains of the railway but a few scattered ties. Similarly, the mantram tears up all the conditioned routes in consciousness, where traffic has been going back and forth automatically. When these tracks are removed, our thoughts are free to travel wherever we choose. Then we can step into the most flammable situation and keep our mind kind, peaceful, and compassionate – all that is required to resolve the crises that threaten our world today. 🌸



Ramagiri Ashram

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## Believing in Mind

*Seng Ts'an*

The great Way has no impediments;  
It does not pick and choose.  
When you abandon attachment and aversion  
You see it plainly.  
Make a thousandth of an inch distinction,  
Heaven and earth swing apart.  
If you want it to appear before your eyes,  
Cherish neither *for* nor *against*.

To compare what you like with what you dislike,  
That is the disease of the mind.  
You pass over the hidden meaning;  
Peace of mind is needlessly troubled.  
It is round and perfect like vast space,  
Lacks nothing, never overflows.  
Only because we take and reject  
Do we lose the means to know its Suchness.

Don't get tangled in outward desire  
Or get caught within yourself.  
Once you plant deep the longing for peace  
Confusion leaves of itself.  
Return to the root and find meaning;  
Follow sense objects, you lose the goal.  
Just one instant of inner enlightenment  
Will take you far beyond the emptiness of the world.

*For the full versions of these passages, see [bmcm.org/passages](http://bmcm.org/passages).*

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# Nine Tips on Detachment

Eknath Easwaran, from a selection of his books

1. To turn inward, we have to detach ourselves from the hold the senses have on the mind; there is no other way.
2. Detachment from the body means the capacity to tell your taste buds, “That’s not what my body needs! That’s what Madison Avenue is telling you to buy. It may look good, but it’s made for shelf life; it’s not going to help *your* life at all.” Only when we have the choice to say no if necessary to physical demands are we able to give the body the care it needs to make it healthy, resilient, and beautiful.
3. In shopping, make up your mind in advance exactly what you want to buy; then go in, pick up what is on your list without looking left or right, and rush straight for the exit, preferably stopping at the cashier’s on your way.
4. Every one of us can enrich his sadhana, improve her contribution to the world, by giving the utmost concentration to the job at hand in a spirit of detachment. Both these are necessary: concentration and detachment. When they are present together, it is enough to go on giving our best in fulfilling the responsibilities with which we are entrusted. As sadhana deepens, new opportunities will open up to suit our growing needs and capacities.

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5. Detachment does not mean that we are indifferent or unconcerned, but that we are not entangled. Detachment from work, for instance, doesn't mean that we lean back with our feet up on our desk. We work harder than ever; we do our very best, but we are not caught in the results. We don't worry about the job, and we don't get elated if we get the results we wanted or depressed if we do not.
  6. Worrying about results not only makes us less effective, it is futile. By our very nature we see only a small part of the total picture, and we make our plans on an appropriately narrow and egocentric scale. But when we learn simply to do our best and leave the question of success or failure to the Lord, the result can really be spectacular.
  7. A very effective technique for learning detachment from moods and opinions is to work on reducing your likes and dislikes, not only in personal relationships but in everything.
  8. To love completely, it is not enough if we care deeply; we must also be detached from ourself. To know what is best for someone, I have to be able to step aside from my own prejudices and preconceptions, slip into that person's shoes, and become one with him temporarily, looking at life through his eyes rather than my own.
  9. If you have detachment, you can be affectionate and loving, you can have rich, satisfying relationships, but you will never get caught in clinging to people or things in the hope of extracting security.

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## Living in Wisdom

### *The Bhagavad Gita*

They live in wisdom  
Who see themselves in all and all in them,  
Whose love for the Lord of Love has consumed  
Every selfish desire and sense craving  
Tormenting the heart. Not agitated  
By grief or hankering after pleasure,  
They live free from lust and fear and anger.  
Fettered no more by selfish attachments,  
They are not elated by good fortune  
Nor depressed by bad. Such are the seers.

Even as a tortoise draws in its limbs,  
The wise can draw in their senses at will.  
Aspirants abstain from sense pleasures,  
But they still crave for them. These cravings all  
Disappear when they see the Lord of Love.  
For even of those who tread the path,  
The stormy senses can sweep off the mind.  
But they live in wisdom who subdue them  
And keep their minds ever absorbed in me.





Ramagiri Ashram

When you keep thinking about sense objects,  
Attachment comes. Attachment breeds desire,  
The lust of possession which, when thwarted,  
Burns to anger. Anger clouds the judgment  
And robs you of the power to learn from  
Past mistakes. Lost is the discriminative  
Faculty, and your life is utter waste.

But when you move amidst the world of sense  
From both attachment and aversion freed,  
There comes the peace in which all sorrows end,  
And you live in the wisdom of the Self.

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## COMMUNITY STORY

### Seeking to Make a Difference in the World

For getting the ego out of projects, I appreciate Easwaran's advice in Tip #4 (page 22), "Every one of us can enrich his sadhana, improve her contribution to the world, by giving the utmost concentration to the job at hand in a spirit of detachment." One recurring pattern for me in recent years has been to get involved in seemingly selfless projects in an ego-driven way. For days or weeks or months I have worked hard and thought about some project frequently, then I have ended up disappointed and burned out when things didn't work out the way I wanted them to.

Easwaran states that "detachment does not mean that we are indifferent or unconcerned, but that we are not entangled. . . . We don't worry about the job, and we don't get elated if we get the results we wanted or depressed if we do not." I would love to be able to have that kind of detachment. The recent book study of Easwaran's *The Mantram Handbook* with the eSatsang and BMCM Satsang Live has given me helpful advice and spiritual companionship as I work on incorporating the spirit of detachment into my volunteer work. I have been trying to direct my thoughts to the mantram or the needs of others if the thoughts of some project crop up at an unappointed time.

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## A concrete way to increase detachment

However, it still is hard to catch my mind when it starts wandering down the path of selfish attachment to a project. As I was reading the first article in this journal, “The Ticket Inspector,” I realized that when I feel an urge to check for email updates about some project earlier than necessary, that is a sign that a bunch of unruly ego-filled thoughts are trying to board my thought train. I can instead say some mantrams and give my full concentration to some other activity or the needs of others. I look forward to this concrete new way I have to work on increasing my detachment.

As I seek to make a difference in this world, I can ground myself in Easwaran’s advice that “Both these are necessary: concentration and detachment. When they are present together, it is enough to go on giving our best in fulfilling the responsibilities with which we are entrusted. As sadhana deepens, new opportunities will open up to suit our growing needs and capacities.”

— Elizabeth, Colorado

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## COMMUNITY STORY

### A New Tenderness

I have struggled in my marriage for a long time. Though my eight-point practice has continued from when I first met my wife, I have doubted that it was having positive effects. Why was I still struggling to connect, to understand, to choose loving thoughts, if I was giving my best to my sadhana? Despite this doubt, somehow my commitment to Easwaran and my practice continued.

My wife and I recently decided to see a marriage counsellor. Not out of desperation, but out of a deep sense that we couldn't do it on our own, that we needed help.

From the outset, we both could sense (our counsellor too) that this was good for us. We began talking, again. We began listening, again. Slowly we made our way towards the more dangerous and difficult parts of our relationship that had separated us. These counselling sessions were demanding, and I was grateful that at this time I was a part of the BMCM Affiliate Program, which actively strengthened my sadhana.

#### **I could keep listening**

Then in one recent session, my wife expressed feelings about our relationship that were very difficult and upsetting. Very painful things to hear. Yet something new happened. Where in the past I would have leapt to my

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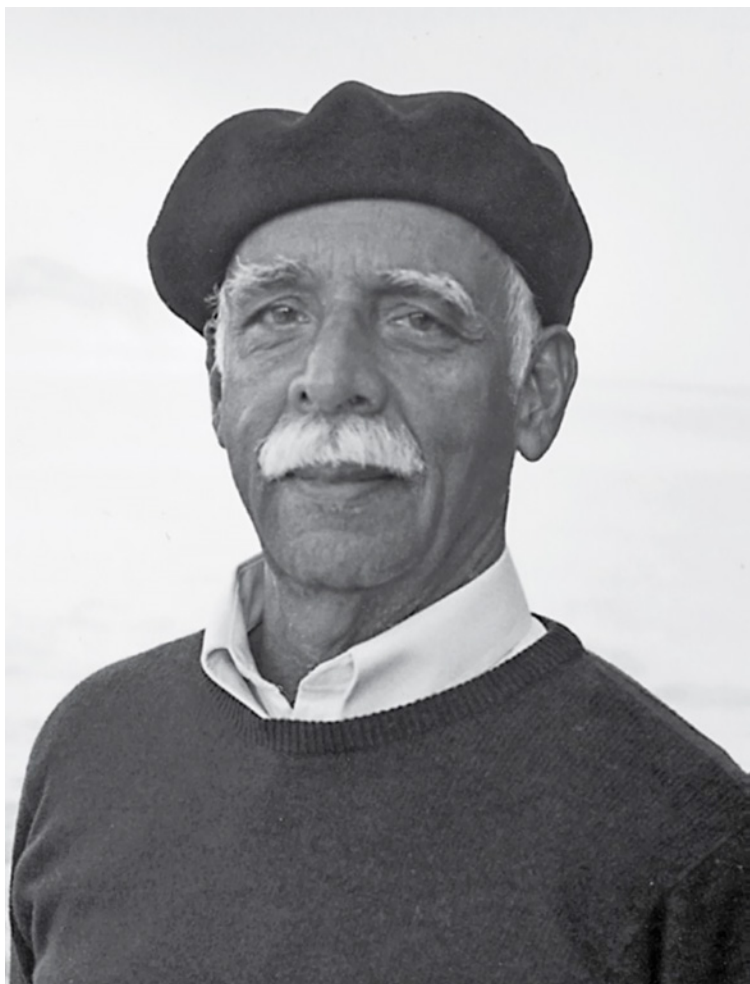
own defense, I found it possible to listen, and to keep listening. I felt this very clear sense that while her words were accurate, they were not describing me, they were describing not-me – that though my responsibility for the causes of her feelings was very real, my deeper self was beyond the reach of painful words.

## Gratitude

And then being aware of her hurt, I felt gratitude and new tenderness. When there is something to renounce, as part of sadhana, I often do it slowly, begrudgingly. This was different. Now I felt my wife had made me aware of a part of me that had gotten in the way of our relationship. A stumbling block. And far from feeling begrudging, I rejoiced now to see it, for now I was able to begin tossing it overboard one armload at a time and watch it crash into the deep blue sea.

I later realized that I would not have been able to listen with detachment to my wife if it had not been for all my years of sadhana. And because this happened during the months of this year's Affiliate Program, I believe the spiritual strength of this group opened new doors in my marriage. I am profoundly grateful for my practice and the patient, expert guidance of our Teacher.

— Graham, Canada



Easwaran, 1980s

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# Mastering the Thinking Process

Eknath Easwaran, from *Essence of the Upanishads*

In my village in India we used to celebrate certain holidays with fireworks displays, which were announced in a dramatic manner. We had a kind of miniature homemade cannon packed with gunpowder, and instead of a fuse the older boys in the village made a trail of gunpowder in little mounds, close to each other but not touching. Then the temple manager would ask for a volunteer – usually one of my cousins, the one who liked to play the part of a demon whenever we had a play. The priest would give him a torch. “Light the first pile,” he would say, “and run for your life!” When the powder flares up, the blaze leaps to the second, then to the third. After half a dozen leaps the little cannon goes off with a roar and a cloud of black smoke, announcing to the village that the celebration is about to begin.

Much of our thinking is like that. Each little gunpowder pile of thought is separate, but each carries a kind of emotional charge. One thought or sense-perception comes, it reminds us of something else, and a little trail of explosive associations runs into the depths of consciousness and sets off a conditioned response.

Today, for example, I was watching people pass a bakery where all kinds of tantalizing goods were displayed. Most of them turned a little and paused to smell. Eyes to me are like little windows; when someone’s attention flickered to a piece of

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German chocolate cake, it was like looking into consciousness where the mind was rubbing its hands together and saying, “Ahhh!” This is not cause and effect. The cake does not sit there outside us and tell the mind, “Now make some waves.” The whole drama takes place within the mind. *Chitta*, or consciousness, forms an impression of German chocolate cake; that is one thought. Then we think, “I like German chocolate!” That is a second thought. “I want some!” is a third. Not only can these three not touch, there is a little interval between them in which *chitta* is still – a little no-thought between thoughts. The idea that one thought causes the next is very much like the conclusion that the eye of a cat is the cause of its tail.

### Each thought is separate

Sometimes during those fireworks announcements, one of the piles in our powder trail would simply fizzle. We boys would run away holding our ears in anticipation and nothing would happen; we had to come back feeling a little foolish and try again. When you see each thought as separate, that is what you can do in meditation: take an explosive association – a particular memory, say – and defuse it of its emotional charge. With that one act, how many personal problems can fall away! The chain of conditioning is broken. You do not lose the capacity to respond; quite the contrary. But you no longer have to explode.

Another comparison is helpful here: a motion picture. A motion picture is more than just a few reels of film. It is essentially the process of projecting that film, so that what we



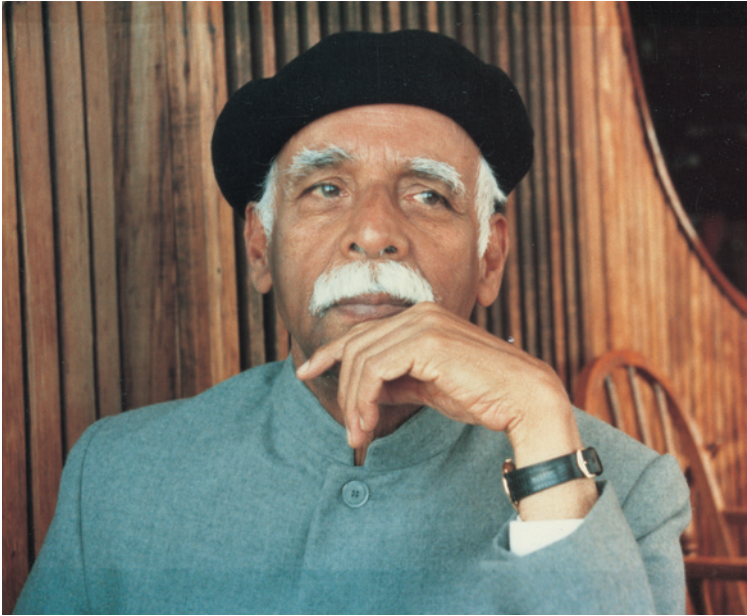
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“see” on the screen is continuous action. Actually, of course, what registers on the eyes is nothing of the kind. A picture is flashed, the eye perceives it; then the eye perceives an instant of darkness before the next picture is flashed, and so on. Only when the projection is slowed down can we see separate images, and only when we stop the projector and look at the film do we see that there is no connection between frames. The whole illusion of motion depends on the speed of projection. Similarly, the whole force of cause and effect in thinking comes from the rush of the mind.

### The fast mind misunderstands

Meher Baba, a twentieth-century Indian mystic, said succinctly that a mind that is fast is sick; a mind that is slow is sound. The diagnosis is quite accurate. “Fast,” in fact, means a mind with many thoughts; the more thoughts trying to crowd through, the faster the flow. One thought comes and almost before it passes, up comes another hanging on to its heels. They rush past in such a tumble that we cannot separate or control them, and the result is the illusion of a continuous force. A stimulus comes and before we know it, up comes the response. The fast mind misunderstands, exaggerates, overlooks, and vacillates, rushing to judgment and jumping to conclusions.

The whole process reminds me of a game that children in India play called Monkey’s Tail. Each child is a monkey. One little monkey catches on to another monkey’s tail, a third catches the tail of the second, and so on, until you have ten or twelve monkeys all hanging on to the leader and running all



Easwaran, 1980s

over the place. That is thinking. A thought does not even have a tail; that is the comedy of it. And what happens in meditation is that each individual thought begins to feel a little silly. “I must be getting terribly shortsighted,” it says. “Look at that! There is no tail at all.” Then when you start to get angry, you feel absurd; where is the connection?

### **What conditioned thinking can do**

Fear is like this too, as I can illustrate with a vivid memory from my childhood. I had cut my leg when I was swimming, so my granny took me to the doctor in the neighboring town.

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He was a good friend of hers, so she managed to convey to him tactfully that I had a real aversion to pain. “Of course,” he promised kindly. “I’ll be as careful as I can. I just need to clean this up a bit and then apply some iodine.”

Now, iodine is applied in India on the slightest provocation, and its acute burning sensation was all too familiar to us boys. So the moment I heard the word “iodine,” my mind began to race and my heart fell into my sandals. I closed my eyes, and when I felt the liquid flow over the open cut, the burning was so terrible I lifted the roof off.

After a few minutes, everything subsided. I opened my eyes. “Was it dreadfully painful?” the doctor asked.

“Oh, yes.”

“I haven’t applied the iodine yet.”

That is what conditioned thinking can do. It shows the remarkable power of the mind; one little suggestion and it creates a whole experience. The flow of thoughts depends surprisingly little on what goes on outside us. And the implication is marvelous: we do not need to change our environment to solve personal problems; all we have to do is master our thinking process and change our response to the environment.

### **No connection between stimulus and response**

When I compare the process of thinking to a movie, people sometimes ask, “Does this mean that thinking is not ‘real’? Is the connection between stimulus and response just an illusion, like the motion we see in a film?” The answer is in one sense

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yes, in another no. When the rush of the mind has been greatly slowed down through the practice of meditation, we can actually observe that there is no connection between stimulus and response. At that level of consciousness we also have the will required to translate this awareness into action, by ceasing to do what a compulsive samskara demands. With a lot of systematic effort, that compulsive connection can be cut once and for all. Only then can we say it was never “real.” As long as the mind is flowing fast and these compulsions are acted on, the force behind them is very real indeed.

### **Making the mind switch back and forth**

To cut these connections, we need to learn to slow down the rushing, unruly process that is the mind. Here again, let me use film as an illustration. The other day I saw a travelogue in which the main principle seemed to be “No shot longer than a second.”

The instant I recognized what was on the screen, something new was flashed in its place. It kept my mind continually grasping. After a few minutes it was too painful to watch, because this sort of thing is very hard on attention.

The fast mind is very similar to that film. It whirs along the same sequence of thoughts for a few frames, but at every suggestive opportunity it keeps trying to splice in extra footage. In cartoons, you know, you see a line and then suddenly it starts to bend, grows ears and a fluffy tail, and turns into a rabbit before your eyes. The same thing can happen when we think of a German chocolate cake. It is not simply a lifeless

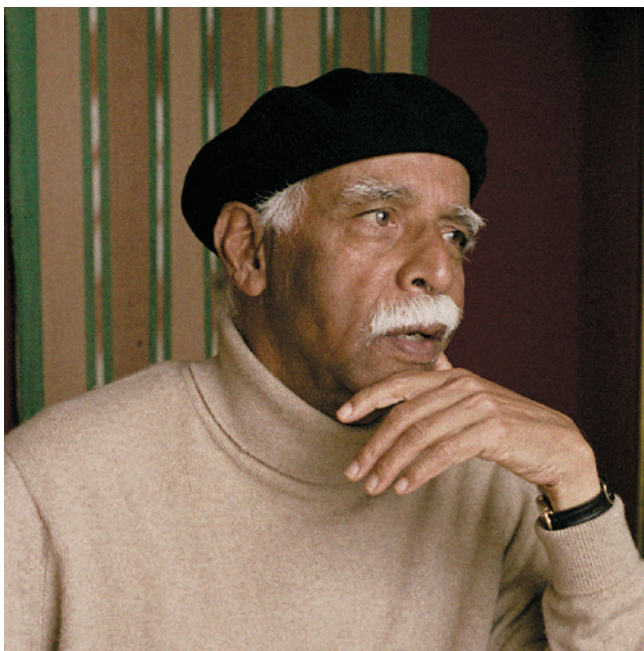
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image; it becomes animated with tantalizing flavors – sugar, chocolate, and lots of butter – and memories. You remember the last time you had German chocolate cake; you remember the first time; you remember whom you were with and what you did. When this happens, you are really in another place and another time – a place not in the real world, and a time that does not exist. You settle down in a little corner to enjoy that cake all by yourself, and as far as thinking is concerned, you actually are eating it. There may be no calories involved, but your desires are inflated. A few more fantasies like this and you may find yourself in your favorite bakery, taking away a large pink box.

The vast majority of our thoughts consist of this kind of unnecessary footage. The more thoughts we try to squeeze in, the faster the mind has to whirl along. The fast mind cannot even decide what to think. It has a lot to fit in, so it keeps cutting and splicing – first this desire, then that, then this again. When we believe we are doing or thinking two things at a time, we are really making the mind switch back and forth a thousand times, in and out of a lot of chopped-up footage. The results are painful: a divided will, poor attention, vacillation, and a great many other problems.

## Tools for mastering thinking

There are two basic tools for mastering the thinking process. The first is meditation, which is described in the Hindu scriptures with a beautifully precise image: there should be a smooth, unbroken flow of attention on a single subject, like



Easwaran, 1980s

the flow of oil poured from one vessel to another. In my own method, I make the mind go slowly through the words of a particular passage from the scriptures or the great mystics – say, the Sermon on the Mount or the Bhagavad Gita – as slowly as I can. Whenever the mind wants to slip off on another line of thought, I keep my attention on the words of the passage. It may take years, but eventually thought flows smoothly without interruption. Then attention becomes as powerful as a laser; it does not flicker, but penetrates to the core of a subject wherever it is turned.

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The other tool is what in Sanskrit is called a *mantram* – a short, powerful spiritual formula that represents the highest we can conceive. Most major religious traditions have a mantram; some have more than one. Christians often use the name of Jesus or the Jesus Prayer; Jews, *Barukh attah Adonai* or the Hasidic formula *Ribono shel olam*. Muslims repeat the name of Allah or a sacred phrase such as *Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim*. One of the oldest Buddhist mantrams is *Om mani padme hum*. Hindus have a great number of mantrams; one of the best loved is the one that Mahatma Gandhi used, *Rama, Rama*. Whatever it is, the mantram is repeated in the mind as often as possible throughout the day. Once it “takes,” the mantram can become like a sword; you just repeat it a few times and the nexus between stimulus and response is cut. When your mind is stuck in some thought you do not like, you can repeat the mantram, lift your mind out of its rut, and switch it over to something better. Meditation slows the thinking process down; the mantram keeps it from acting on its conditioning and speeding up again during the day.

### Cutting off negative thinking at its source

When the thought-process is mastered, the benefit is simple: you can think what you want, and you can stop thinking what you do not want. I have to confess that I did not appreciate the significance of this until I experienced it. When I felt exasperated or angry, it occurred to me that instead of dwelling on negative feelings, I might be able to draw on my meditation to do something about them. Then I made what was probably

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my most significant discovery in getting to know the mind. Whatever state the mind is in – resentment, fear, frustration, depression – if you learn to meditate, you do not have to dwell on provocations or bring up childhood episodes. All you have to do is sit down for an hour or so, reach into the depths of consciousness where the mind is whirring away, and cut off that negative line of thinking at its source. When you get up from meditation, the burden of those feelings will have fallen from your shoulders.

It is not enough to do this in the mind, however. Until we actually translate it into daily living, we are still living automatically.

### Pushed into action

My grandmother had a way of reminding me of this long before I was old enough to understand it. Every day after school she used to ask me what I had done. Once I replied, “I really lived it up today, Granny!” I recounted all the activities I had indulged in that day, but she remained unimpressed. When I had finished my catalog she said simply, “You’ve done a lot of things today, son, but I wouldn’t call them living.”

It stung, but over the years I began to see that she was right. I was not living; in fact, I had very little say in what I did. My life was being lived not by me but by everybody around me – Tom, Dick, and Harry. I didn’t choose to be happy; Tom made me happy. I didn’t choose to get depressed; Harry made me depressed. They acted; I reacted. A good deal of what I did and even thought was dependent on how they behaved.



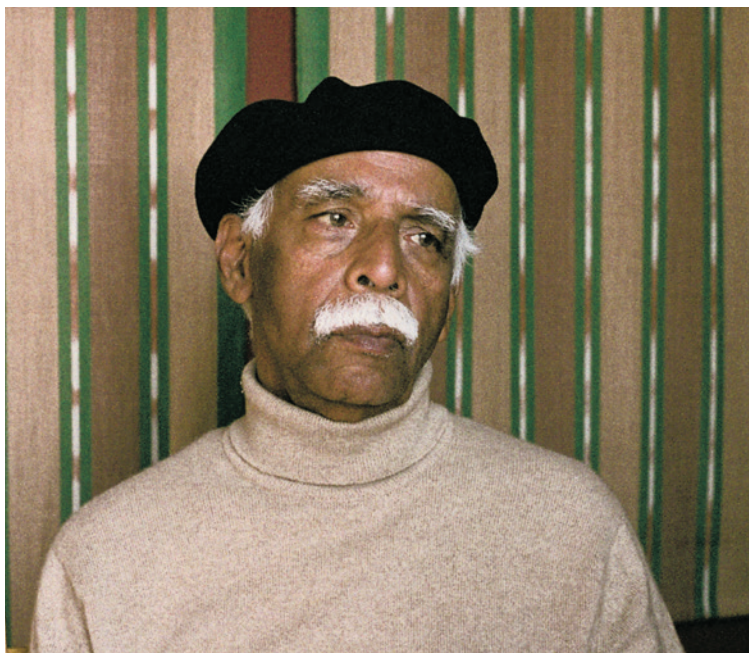
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Once I took to meditation, I began to catch glimpses of what was going on in the mind. Samskaras, conditioned habits of thinking, were rehearsing a show over which I had no control. Even if I didn't want to act in a particular way, my samskaras would push me into action the way a bully on the beach pushes a small boy into the waves. It really made me angry. I wanted to say, "Who do you think you are, telling me what to do?" They played innocent: "We're *you*." But my understanding went deeper by then. Even if Dr. Pavlov himself had tried to tell me I was no more than my conditioning, I knew it was not true. More than that, I was prepared to fight to prove it. Once I understood that I was not even living my own life, there arose a tremendous desire to be free.

### Detaching my responses

I wish I could convey how much energy I saved and how much security I gained when I began detaching my responses from what was going on around me. Without realizing it, I had always gone about wondering, "What is Tom going to say? What will Harry think if I do this?" But once I saw there was no connection between their thinking and my response, I began to concentrate on my own behavior. Whatever someone said or did, I tried never to speak harshly or discourteously. Partly I had learned that lack of courtesy never helps communication; partly I just did not like the idea of being a human jukebox, where someone puts in a nickel and out come a lot of unpleasant words.

I wonder if any place offers more opportunities to practice



Easwaran, 1980s

this than a large university. Wherever you are – at department meetings, in the faculty room, on the academic council, at a professional conference – there will always be some obliging colleague to contradict your opinions with pleasure and zeal.

There is nothing wrong with this. Opinions clash easily when people feel concern, and in my opinion it is much better to have differences and clash over them than not to be concerned at all. But now I began to understand that it is possible to express strong convictions and face opposition with equanimity, without going on the defensive or losing respect.

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As I learned to observe the flow of thoughts, I began to see that the whole drama of disagreement takes place within the mind. When I differed with a colleague, my quarrel was not really with him or his opinions but with my idea of him, my idea of his opinions. In other words, my thoughts were at odds with each other. There was my idea of what he meant, and then my response to that idea: “I don’t like it!” The mind was flickering back and forth, which meant that I was divided against myself. And the application I found marvelous. If we have a problem in a particular relationship, no amount of external manipulation can solve that problem. The place to solve it is within the mind.

### Act the part

When the thinking process is mastered, most problems in personal relationships can be solved.

In putting this into practice, I made a number of discoveries about the workings of the mind. One was that to learn to live in freedom, it is a great help to act the part. This gradually brings a measure of detachment. After all, when I got exasperated with a colleague, I was really acting a part I had not chosen. Why not change the script?

A few years ago I saw a film in which a skillful actor played the part of a dissolute man-about-town. After a while I realized with surprise that the same man was also playing the shy, retiring college student who was his foil. When the climax came, he had to play both parts together. I couldn’t help admiring the ease with which he was able to switch back

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and forth: one moment the very picture of an experienced, world-weary bon vivant, the next moment speaking just like a bookworm in that peculiar nasal tone that sometimes goes with too much erudition.

### Mastery over our roles

As my meditation deepened, I began to see that we can have that kind of mastery over all our roles – parent, child, wife or husband, teacher, carpenter, whatever. Immediately I began to practice my acting. When I went to a meeting of the academic senate, I did not go as Eknath Easwaran; I went as Sir Laurence Olivier playing Eknath Easwaran. The opinions were the same, expressed at least as well. But when someone stood up to tear my argument to pieces, I learned to sit back with studied calm, knit my brow in proper intellectual indignation, listen carefully, and then take a few minutes to couch my rebuttal in good Victorian English. It enabled me to listen with respect and to reply without rancor, and interestingly enough, I found myself making a better contribution. Not only that, I began to get good reviews from the critics. “You were rather effective this afternoon,” a colleague would say. “Not a bad point about academic standards.”

I do not want to give the impression that this was easy. I had plenty of provocation. There *are* people who are disagreeable, and the normal, natural human reaction is to stay away from them. But the normal, natural reaction is conditioned, and I wanted to live in freedom. So I began doing something that was just the opposite of natural: I started to move closer to

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people I did not like, or who did not like me. And instead of becoming upset or antagonistic when I was with them, I became as vigilant as if I were in a soccer match. If the other person was rude, I took an extra minute or two to repeat my mantram and find words that were courteous, kind, yet still to the point. And instead of avoiding that person, I went out of my way to sit next to him and listen to opinions that were poles apart from my own. In a really difficult relationship, I even looked for ways to share my leisure time with that person: go to a play, perhaps, or play a game of tennis.

I must admit that I never did succeed in winning some of these people over. That can be terribly frustrating, and I remember reproaching myself occasionally for wasting all those hours on a losing battle. Then I realized that the battle had not been lost. In fact, I should consider those people my best friends; because of them, I had made myself so secure that I could function in freedom everywhere.

### **Beneath all likes and dislikes**

About this time I made another pertinent discovery: liking and disliking itself is a samskara, a conditioned habit. Beneath all likes and dislikes is a basic compulsion of the mind to pass judgment on everything: “I like this, I don’t like that.” When this compulsion is rigid, it is rigid everywhere – with food, with philosophies, and especially with other people. If we can learn to detach response from stimulus in any strong like or dislike, the whole likes-and-dislikes samskara is weakened. As a result, all our relationships improve.

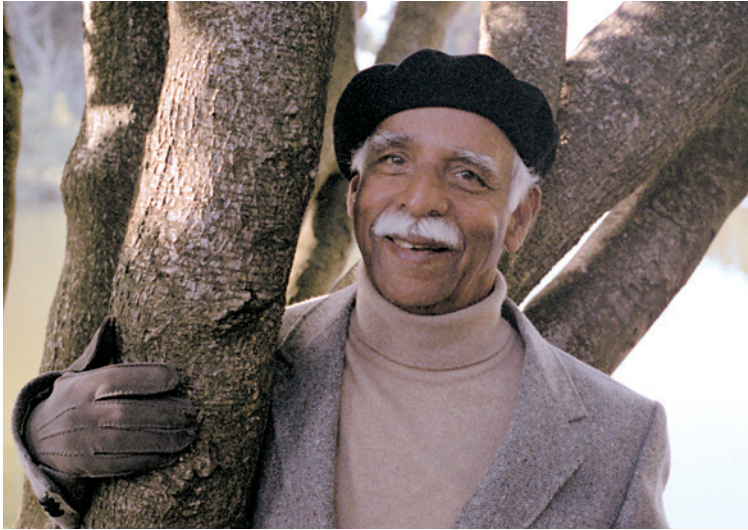
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One of the most effective ways to apply this is with food. Taste, as Gandhi says, lies not in the palate but in the mind. We like what we learn to like, and as often as not, we like what is not particularly nutritious and dislike what is.

In Kerala, for example, we have a particular kind of mango that is eaten green, when it is acutely sour. There is nothing inherently pleasant about this sensation; in fact, a detached physiologist would probably call it painful. But everybody around you likes it, everybody does it, so you learn to like it too. And in the end, you cannot do without it. It is a complete perversion of taste: what is nourishing tastes bad, what burns tastes good. Not only that, to add to the tanginess, South Indians combine such mangoes with hot red pepper and salt. There is a particular enjoyment in the way the combination sets your teeth on edge. In addition, we children had a special sauce of our own: we usually removed the mangoes by stealth from someone else's tree.

### The full significance

After I had been meditating for some time, I began to see that this was not a habit from which my body benefited. I stopped eating those mangoes; and of course my taste buds immediately brought out their little protest signs and went on strike: "Unfair!" My family was not much help. Some of my girl cousins would bring out mango, red pepper, and salt, sit down in front of me, and say, "What a shame you've stopped eating green mangoes!" It took some time for me to realize the full significance of what I was doing. Not only had I freed myself



Easwaran, 1980s

from a compulsive liking for hot peppers; I had weakened a little the whole likes-and-dislikes samskara. As a result, all my other likes and dislikes were a little looser, even in my relationships.

This discovery gave me the motivation for juggling with likes and dislikes everywhere – in the food I ate, the jobs I did, even the books I read. I wouldn't do something simply because I did not like it; some things are not only disagreeable but pointless. But whenever I found something beneficial that I did not like, I learned to do it with gusto. Over the years, it gave me quite a reputation. Once a friend at the university asked, "How did you ever learn to get along with Professor So-and-so?" I answered mysteriously, "By giving up sour mangoes!" 🌿

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## COMMUNITY STORY

### Detachment: A Sense of Openness

Easwaran teaches us that to make time for meditation, we often need to put fewer things on our day-to-day to do lists. He suggests a red pencil exercise in which we list what we are doing, then cross out the things that don't advance our spiritual development. I have done this enough to know that gifts always pour into the created space.

Fourteen years ago, however, I needed a bigger pencil. What remained after the red pencil was largely selfless service. But there was too much. And in the speeded-up life that resulted, I was an accident waiting to happen.

So I took a big red pencil to my life by taking a year to step back. I retained just enough work to keep bread on the table, but disengaged from almost all my regular activities. In the large amount of unscheduled time, I tried to be open to little opportunities for selfless service. After seven months of this slowed down way of being, something happened. I realized that I could give up everything.

The ensuing feeling of lightness was liberating, and I planned a different and much less busy life going forward. As my year away came to a close, I did end up putting a few things from my former life back. But they felt different. The difference, I finally realized, was that I'd already given them up. I was detached from the outcome of my actions. That sense of openness has changed everything.



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I began pursuing a more limited palette of activities not out of compulsion, but because they seemed like good platforms for selfless service. Detachment from the outcomes made it easier to get my ego out of the way. Fear diminished, as I stopped worrying about things working out the way I wanted. Anger changed to curiosity when things went differently from my plans. I was more open to other people. Relationships deepened.

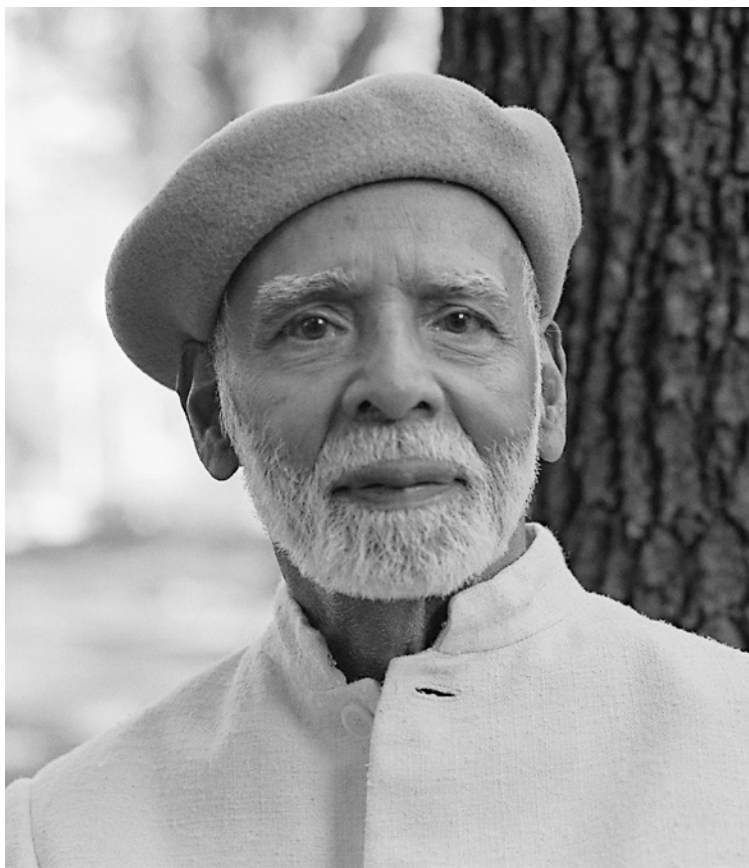
I purposely kept myself a little unsettled and under-scheduled. And into that space a new life emerged that had traces of the old, but new directions that were possible because I wasn't attached to whether they turned out in ways that looked like success to the world.

In this detached way of being, the challenges of the householder life now are just fodder for spiritual practice. The eight-point program, particularly meditation, is the center.

However, after 13 years, it now feels like time to pull out the red pencil again. My wife just retired, a grandchild beckons, and work again feels too busy. So I am giving up my out-front roles in favor of behind-the-scenes mentoring and support roles. I am renewing my detachment from outcomes, and focusing my attention on preparing for the final detachment – from this body and this life that awaits us all.

It will be interesting to see what emerges into that energized space.

— A passage meditator in the Midwest



Easwaran, 1990s

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# A Long, Creative, Fulfilling Life

Eknath Easwaran, from our journal archive

When scientists began contemplating the conquest of space, the first problem they encountered – a problem that had to be solved before they could make any headway at all – was how to get beyond the pull of the earth’s gravity. A rocket has to build up a speed of twenty-five thousand miles per hour to escape this pull, and engineers quickly ran into a kind of “catch-22”: to attain this speed, an ordinary rocket would have to be so large that its sheer weight would never allow it to escape the pull of gravity.

Yet the human spirit delights in overcoming obstacles. Undaunted, scientists finally came up with the idea of a multi-stage rocket, with one or more independent boosters attached. Each booster holds fuel, which it burns in one great leap upward. As soon as its fuel is expended, its job is done and the booster is dropped, freeing the spacecraft from the burden of its great weight.

## A higher reality

Exploring inner space confronts us with a similar problem. What makes it so difficult to turn inward in meditation is the pull of objects and experiences outside us, the attraction of the physical world. Even memories, anxieties, plans, and so on draw their power from experiences of the senses: things we have felt, seen, heard, smelled, or tasted, which we want (or fear) to experience again.

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This attraction is only natural, and there is nothing inherently wrong in it – just as gravity is natural, and there is nothing wrong with staying on earth. Problems arise only when we want more: new worlds to explore, a higher reality. Then we discover that the pull of our body, our senses, and our private, personal satisfactions is what keeps us earthbound, preventing us from soaring to those heights where we can look back and see that all of existence is one indivisible whole.

### Building up momentum

To rise above this pull, we have to build up a great deal of momentum. Just as in launching a rocket, immense power is required. But where are we to get such power? Space scientists can experiment with such explosive mixtures such as liquid hydrogen and oxygen, but what do we use as human beings? The mystics give the answer: the power that drives a human being is desire. Our desires are our fuel.

I am full of admiration for the world's astronauts, who undergo such arduous training in their desire to go where no one has gone before. That desire is so great that it overrides all lesser predilections. For the sake of a few days in outer space and the thrill of seeing the earth floating free in a sea of stars, they are willing to learn all kinds of strange new skills and put up with endless deprivations.

To reach our true Self, called the *Atman* in Sanskrit, shining like the full moon in the depths of consciousness, requires the same measure of dedication and training – and here, too, the secret is desire. If it is the power of our personal desires that

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keeps us earthbound, it is that same power, when released and harnessed, that will provide the fuel to launch us into higher consciousness.

To apply this we too need a booster rocket strategy, and the mystics of all religions have given us one, based on their own personal experience. In English it is called detachment: the art of withdrawing desire from lesser things, letting them fall away, so as to harness their power to reach the heights of what a human being can attain.

### The secret of health

This journey brings an overflowing, ever-present sense of joy. The Buddha, who almost never talked about himself, once admitted quietly, “I am the happiest of mortals. There is no one happier than I am.” This is the joy for which every one of us is born. Not tuppenny-ha’penny pleasures, not tinsel delights or costume jewelry, but a jewel that is beyond price: the jewel hidden in the very depths of our hearts.

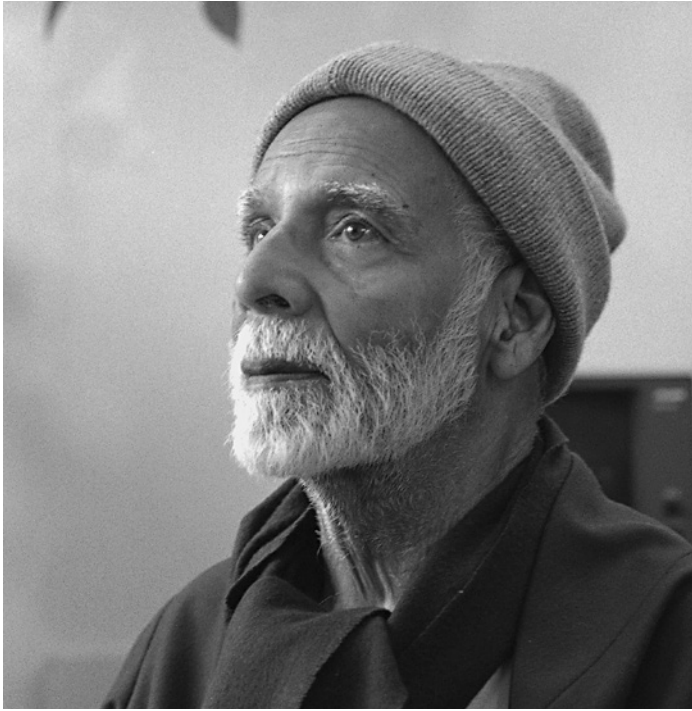
Detachment not only releases joy; it is also the secret of health. It is the best medical insurance in the world, and not only because it can keep us free from physical habits that sap our vitality. Most illness has a serious emotional element. While there is an important place for physical measures in the treatment of disease, a mind at peace and a heart flooded with love can release healing powers that strengthen and revitalize the physical system. Strength can be regained even after years of emotional instability. In extreme cases, I believe, recovery can be brought about even from what seems a terminal illness.

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Today, of course, it is widely appreciated that because of advances in medical knowledge, we can expect to live much longer than was reasonable at the beginning of the twentieth century. But we can lead lives that are not only longer but richer, more loving, and more productive. The next steps in stretching the limits of human health and longevity, I believe, will not be in biotechnology. They will come from learning to govern the way we think and feel. Detachment is a longevity skill. Freedom from compulsive emotional entanglements is the best insurance against stress. More than that, by opening a window onto a fuller, loftier view of life than that dictated by self-interest, detachment brings a sense of purpose. Without a reason for living, the human being withers and dies inside. However paradoxical it may sound, it is detachment that enables us to give ourselves wholeheartedly to worthwhile work without ever getting depressed, despondent, or burned out – right into the last days of our lives.

### **Detachment and work**

Most people who work hard – which means most men and women in this country – bring their work home with them, yapping like a poodle at their heels. At the dinner table, when they sit thinking about their deadlines and responsibilities, the poodle is nestled under the chair, whining away. They curl up with it at night and dream about reports that haven't been filed, statistics that don't point to the right conclusions, mail that hasn't been responded to or that has been sent out with the wrong memo attached. Detachment gives us the capacity to



Easwaran, 1990s

concentrate completely while on the job and to drop our work completely when we walk out the door.

A detached worker is a reliable worker, a cheerful worker, a harmonious worker. And when you can drop your work completely at the end of the day, you arrive home ready to give all your love to your family and friends.

You feel fresh, relaxed. You have no need to give vent to the kind of frustration that millions of good people air: “Leave me alone. I’ve had a miserable day!” Mahatma Gandhi worked

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fifteen hours a day for fifty years for all of us who want a politically free world.

When he was asked, “Don’t you want a vacation, Mr. Gandhi?” he said quietly, “I’m always on vacation.” It wasn’t a flippant reply; he meant every word of it. So don’t content yourself with two weeks in July or two weeks at a ski resort in January. You deserve three hundred and sixty-five days of vacation, and that is exactly what detachment can give you.

### Protection at every stage of life

Detachment brings this kind of protection at every stage of life. Many of the physical problems associated with old age, for example, are not at all a necessary part of aging. The fact that they are common does not mean they are inevitable. Not only senility but even certain physical problems may well have more to do with life-style and thought-style than with changes triggered by some biological clock.

As researchers have observed, we have focused so much on “ordinary aging” – what happens to the majority – that we have ignored “successful aging,” which we can observe in men and women like Mahatma Gandhi, George Bernard Shaw, and Mother Teresa, who grow in wisdom and vitality right into the last days of a long, creative, fulfilling life. I grant you that in the evening of your life you may not be able to compete successfully on Centre Court at Wimbledon. But every one of us can enjoy the vitality, resourcefulness, and unerring judgment that come from a heart full of love and a vast reservoir of experience. 🌸





Ramagiri Ashram



Christine Easwaran, May 2022



Ramagiri Ashram



Shanti meditation hall at Ramagiri Ashram





Easwaran, 1970s

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## The Quest for Love

Ekknath Easwaran, from *Conquest of Mind*

The mark of true love is as simple as it is rare: it is detachment, not from other people but from our own ego, from the tangle of personal motives that makes us seek happiness in making others conform to our desires. Detachment and love go hand in hand. When all selfish attachments are gone, what is left is pure love. The other person is so dear to you that you never have to ask yourself the question, “What is she going to give me?” – in the way of respect, of affection, of loyalty. Once you efface that question from your vocabulary completely, you and that person are no longer separate; both of you are one. That is what love means.

All of us begin the quest for love with a great deal of selfish attachment. That is human nature. But with the help of meditation and the allied disciplines we can diminish this selfish element day by day, by putting the welfare of those around us first and our own personal predilections last.



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## Further Resources for Learning to Meditate and Deepening Your Practice

From the BMCM Programs team

### Introductory Webinars

A chance to try out passage meditation.

[www.bmcm.org/programs/introductory-webinar/](http://www.bmcm.org/programs/introductory-webinar/)

### Introductory Weekend Retreats

Everything you need to get your passage meditation practice started.

[www.bmcm.org/programs/introductory-weekend-online/](http://www.bmcm.org/programs/introductory-weekend-online/)

### *Passage Meditation – A Complete Spiritual Practice*

Easwaran's classic manual, available in print and as an ebook and audiobook.



Attendees at an online retreat

### BMCM Satsang Live

Our twice-weekly online satsang takes place on Tuesdays from 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Pacific Time and is repeated on Sundays from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Pacific Time.

Find more at [www.bmcm.org/community/bmcm-satsang-live/](http://www.bmcm.org/community/bmcm-satsang-live/).

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## Online Retreats, Webinars, & Workshops for early 2023

Our online retreats and programs have become the training ground for those of us who yearn to join Easwaran in making the spiritual renaissance a reality. In the retreats, you will experience turning to your practice, to Easwaran and his teachings, and to a strong spiritual schedule. The retreats combine contemplative activities with practicum times in which you apply your practice directly to your own unique home environment.

### Introductory Webinar:

January 28

### Setu Retreat:

January 20–24

### Weeklong Retreat:

February 24–28

### Returnee Workshop:

March 18

### Introductory Weekend Retreat:

March 24–26

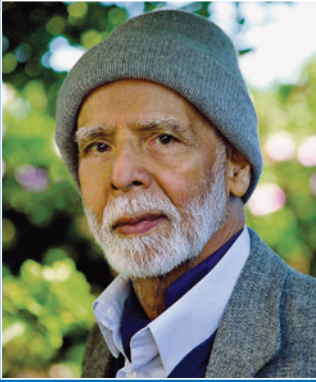
### Affiliate Program:

March 25–July 22

### Returnee Weekend Retreat:

April 14–16

For more information about upcoming events, including fees and financial aid, visit our website at [www.bmcm.org/programs](http://www.bmcm.org/programs). We'd love to have you join us!



The next steps in stretching the limits of human health and longevity, I believe, will not be in biotechnology. They will come from learning to govern the way we think and feel. Detachment is a longevity skill.

— Eknath Easwaran

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