

A Journal for
Spiritual Living
Published by the
Blue Mountain
Center of Meditation
& Nilgiri Press
www.nilgiri.org
Spring 2003
Volume 14, Number 1

Blue Mountain



ESTABLISHED IN 1990 BY EKNATH EASWARAN
FOR PRESENTING HIS EIGHT POINT PROGRAM

Strength in Troubled Times

By Eknath Easwaran

Anyone who wants a peaceful life today, Trotsky is said to have remarked, has chosen the wrong time to be born. The last hundred years have seen incessant turbulence, change, and danger. Around the world, people are living with a deep anxiety about the future.

It is not psychologists but the great mystics who show us how to flourish in such unstable times. With one voice they tell us that this world of change rests on a changeless foundation which can be sought and realized by anyone willing to make that discovery their first priority.

This is a rough world. We can't live only in sunshine. Storms are going to blow, and we have got to learn to deal with them. We can't dictate the times we live in, but we can learn to have a say in how we respond. If the times are troubled, that is no reason why we must be. We can train our mind to face the challenges of life without fear, without anxiety, with courage and with compassion. That is what meditation is for.

It is only natural to ask now and then, "Why was I born into times like these?" The mystics would reply that we have been born to be of service to others. Desperate times means a more desperate need. To

Eknath Easwaran's commentaries for *Blue Mountain* are drawn from the thousands of previously unpublished talks and writings in the Blue Mountain Center archives — part of an ongoing effort to make his teaching freely available around the world.

make our full contribution, we need to train the mind to be at peace in any storm.

Very few of us really know what peace of mind is, the phrase has become so hackneyed. To think peace of mind comes by using chemical aids or moving to some other place or any other external activity is to deny the very understanding of the word *mind*. In order to have peace of mind, thinking should be under control.

Peace of mind is often mistaken for absence of challenges. When there is no challenge, no problem, we say we are happy. This is a very negative interpretation. The positive interpretation is, "Oh, yes, I face a lot of problems, but I know how to deal with them. I am equal to them because I can draw upon deeper resources through the practice of meditation."

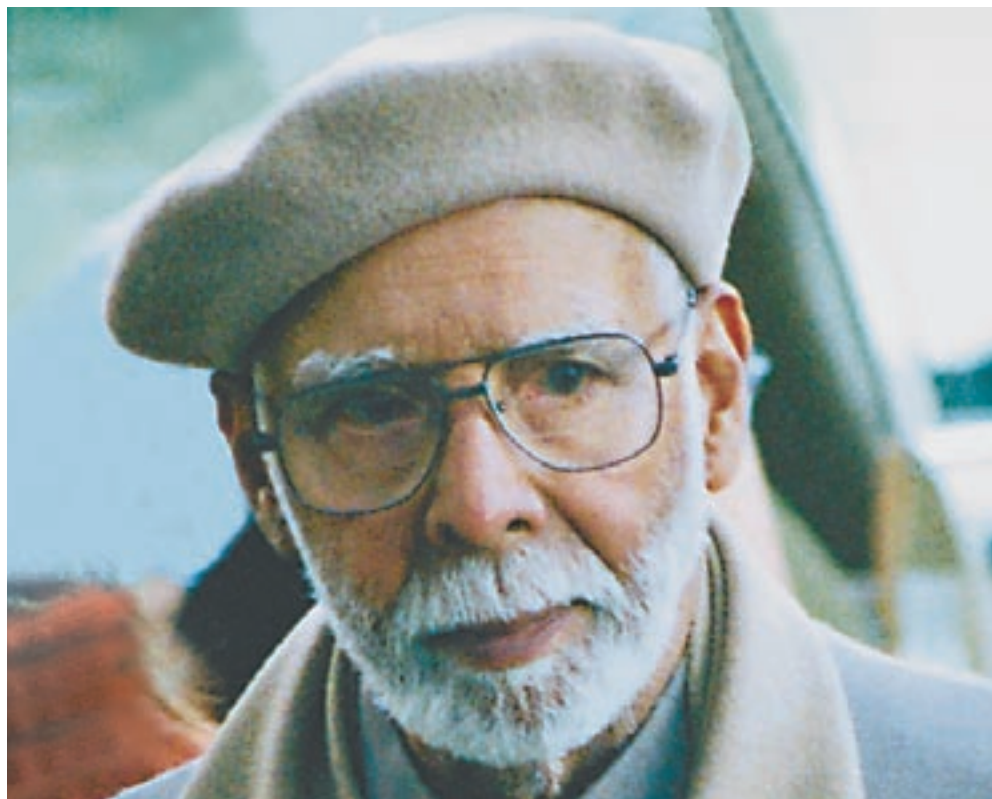
Transforming fear

When I was a boy, I was known for my fear. My cousins and classmates were brave, but I was not. I would never get into a fight, not out of noble motives but out of fear.

*Continued
on page 4*

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

*Below, from our archives:
Sri Eknath Easwaran, 1995*



BLUE MOUNTAIN

The newsletter of
the Blue Mountain
Center of Meditation

Spring 2003

© 2003 by The Blue
Mountain Center of
Meditation, Inc.

The Blue Mountain
Center of Meditation
is a California
nonprofit corporation.
A contribution to the
Center is deductible
from state and
federal income tax.

FOUNDER

Sri Eknath Easwaran

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Christine Easwaran

Sultana Harvey

Terry Morrison

Robert Nichols

Beth Ann O'Connell

BLUE MOUNTAIN

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Christine Easwaran

Blue Mountain is
published quarterly
by Nilgiri Press

Please address all
correspondence to
Post Office Box 256,
Tomales, CA 94971

Telephone 707 878 2369

E-mail info@nilgiri.org

Web www.nilgiri.org

Printed on recycled paper

CONTENTS

Strength in Troubled Times

PAGE 1



The mystics show us how we can understand the roots of fear and flourish even in troubled times.

Ultimately, in the deeper stages of meditation, we can realize the unity of life and transcend fear.

Islands of Calm

PAGE 6

The stories of four women inspire us to meet stressful, even dangerous, situations and make a contribution to peace and harmony.

When Kids Need Inspiration

PAGE 9

Many children, parents, and teachers use spiritual practices like the mantram when there is fear, agitation, or just too much excitement.

Departments

3 Publisher

12 Calendar of Meditation Retreats

Blue Mountain Center of Meditation

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

The Eight Point Program

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

Sri Eknath Easwaran

Schooled in both Eastern and Western traditions, Eknath Easwaran took to the spiritual life amidst a successful career in India as a professor of English literature, a writer, and a lecturer. He came to the University of California, Berkeley, in 1960 on the Fulbright exchange program and established the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation in Northern California in 1961. His 1968 Berkeley class is believed to be the first accredited course in meditation at any Western university. His deep personal experience and his love for his students have made the ancient art of meditation accessible to those who hold jobs and live active lives among friends and family.

A note about Sri Easwaran's name: *Sri* is a traditional Indian honorific, *Eknath* is his family name, and *Easwaran* is the name given to him by his spiritual teacher, his mother's mother.

We Can All Be Heroes



Christine Easwaran

We can all be heroes in our own small spheres. That is how I feel after reading the

stories in this issue. Friends have been telling us how they are applying the Eight Point Program in the challenges of modern life – a theme Sri Easwaran addresses in his lead article. All these friends describe themselves as ordinary. But I find every story extraordinary, whether it is from a young child on the playground of a private school or a mental health nurse on the crime-infested streets of a large city.

In “Islands of Calm” (page 6) we share conversations with four friends who are using the Eight Point Program to face highly challenging situations in their work. They aren’t trying to change others; they are simply dealing with difficulties by changing themselves. But in the process they are making a lasting difference in the lives of those they work with.

“When Kids Need Inspiration” (page 9) shows that these skills are not just for grown-ups. Even a child can use the power of the mantram, or Holy Name, to stay calm and resourceful in times of fear and crisis.

Gandhi for our times

With war concerns high around the world, we are particularly grateful for friends helping to get Sri Easwaran’s message to a wider audience. Our good friend Rich Meyer gave

us a splendid boost recently in getting space for Nilgiri Press at the annual conference of the Association of Global New Thought – Unity Church, the Church of Religious Science, and Science of Mind – in Palm Springs, California. We found a dedicated audience of people already practicing spiritual disciplines and eager to learn more about how Mahatma Gandhi transformed his anger into compassion (see box).

“Now my desire is to serve”

Gandhi – and Sri Easwaran – go on touching people’s lives. I’d like to close with a beautiful letter from a friend in

our Young Adult program who speaks eloquently of her own struggle with the negative forces within and around us all.

“I was brought up in a pretty rough Brooklyn neighborhood,” writes Abby Vinson, “where one learned how to survive by grabbing what one could before someone else got it and going to any lengths to protect it. It seemed that if one didn’t play the game of life that way, he would lose the game. Now I see that this way of thinking only causes great pain for those who think that way and everyone around them.

“As my spiritual practice deepened, I began to change inside.

Oftentimes I am surprised and relieved by my reactions to life and my authentic joy these days! Gandhi said we should become the change we want to see in the world, and I see the world so differently now. Empathy, compassion, a full heart and an intense desire to help has taken up much of the room that once housed fear, resentment, greed, and selfishness.

“I need to keep my practice going strong for myself and for the world. I need to keep working on the Eight Points and visiting the BMCM whenever possible. On some level I comprehend the unity of life and know I am a part of all and all are a part of me. I am so deeply grateful to Eknath Easwaran and the BMCM for the path I have been given.

“I am now back in school, working on my teaching credential. Fame and Fortune were once my driving forces. Now my sincere desire is to serve, and I trust that my ultimate joy lies therein. I understand now why Gandhi was willing to die for the principles he so fervently believed in. I only want to live in a world where they exist.”

To bring about peace in the world, let us start with our own lives.

Christine Easwaran
For the Board of Trustees



Gale Zimmerman (left) of the BMCM represented Nilgiri Press with Laurie Cracraft, a longtime meditator who was instrumental in organizing a Wisdom of Gandhi series for Unity ministers, based on Gandhi the Man.

Mahatma Gandhi in Palm Springs

“Notably missing” from last year’s conference of New Thought churches, Rich Meyer wrote us, “were the wonderful classic works of Sri Eknath Easwaran. I think his books should be made available to all seekers of truth. If you are interested, I would be honored to pay for the cost of a vendor’s booth at the next conference.” This generous offer made Mahatma Gandhi a stronger presence than ever at the Association of Global New Thought 2002 conference in Palm Springs, attended by about 700 people, including 270 ministers. “Their churches are officially committed to nonviolence,” said Tim Flinders, who spoke on Gandhi for the BMCM, “so Gandhi fits well into their mission.”

*Continued
from page 1*

I took heart from the example of another fearful boy who had made himself fearless and showed all India how to shed fear. Mahatma Gandhi had made his life an open book. Everyone in India knew that as a child he had been subject to all kinds of fears. Even as a young man, he confessed, he was afraid to go out at night without his wife. That is the man who went to South Africa as a timid, untrained lawyer and got drawn into selfless service. By the time he returned to India, twenty years later, all that fear had vanished. He could stand against the greatest empire the world has seen and say, "Do your worst. I will not retaliate, but I will never retreat."

Today we would ask, "What kind of therapy did he undergo? What workshops did he take?" But Gandhi never set out to make himself fearless. He didn't focus on his weaknesses at all. He simply began trying to serve those around him, spending less and less time on himself and more on helping others. It is a precious clue, for as we shall see, when we dwell on ourselves we cannot help feeling insecure.

If we study Gandhi's life, we see he had two main disciplines for this transformation: repetition of the mantram, or Holy Name, and daily absorption in the words of India's great scripture, the Bhagavad Gita. These are the cornerstones of my Eight Point Program, except that for me, meditation is not only on the words of the Gita but on any appropriate scripture or inspirational passage from the world's great mystics.

Keep the mind focused

When I began to practice these disciplines in my own life, I realized after a while that my sense of fear was subsiding naturally. But it was years before I understood the dynamics of fear in the mind and why meditation and the mantram are so effective in banishing fear from consciousness.

If we could look under the hood of the mind, we would see that fear is a frantic flickering of attention. The mind is being whipped about like a flame in the wind. Whatever the

provocation, what handicaps us is not an external threat but this inability to concentrate, this incapacity to hold our attention steady. And the practical application is that as attention becomes steady again, fear has to subside.

Scattered attention is the sure sign

Through meditation we can learn to utilize difficult situations for realizing the goal of life.

of a divided mind. Division is tension. Division is friction. Division is ineffectiveness. Division is futility. When I hear those words of Lincoln's, "A house divided against itself cannot stand," I always think of the human mind. Most of us have a mind divided; that is why the mind cannot stand under the impact of life.

The mind can be compared to a huge highway with traffic racing along twenty-four hours a day. The problem is that no one knows how to drive. Who would want to go to San Francisco with somebody who darts in and out of lanes on an instant's notice, or slams on the brakes in the middle of the highway because he wants to admire the scenery? I don't think anybody would be prepared to travel with a driver like that, but on the highway of the mind, that's just the kind of driving we admire. Weaving all over the road? Oh, yeah, that's what we like to do! Stop the car to admire the scenery? That is our special penchant.

This is what we call thinking. And the practical problem is that if a thought creeps up alongside us in the next lane, we get distracted. We see the license plate, FEAR, and we start trembling. We keep glancing over, get jittery, and abruptly find ourselves darting over into its lane. The next thing we know, Fear has a tow hook on our bumper and is dragging us wherever it likes. We are no longer going to

Montgomery Street in San Francisco; we are going to Fear Street in the City of Dread.

This gives a very practical clue to how to solve the problem of fear. If you learn the marvelous capacity to keep your attention steady, any negative emotion can pull alongside and honk, wave, do anything it likes to get its tow hook on you; you won't react. Eventually it will have to go away, because you scarcely know it is there. Swami Vivekananda defined genius as the capacity to pursue one thought like an arrow that goes straight to the target. I would say, like a driver that stays smoothly in one lane.

Meditation is like driving a long distance with a powerful car on cruise control. You select the car-pool lane and drive smoothly to your destination without any difficulty, danger, or delay – no compulsive darting into other people's lanes, no U-turns in the face of traffic, no being totaled and towed away.

The power of the Holy Name

How can we maintain this state outside the period of meditation? That is where the mantram comes in.

The mantram, or Holy Name, is a kind of spiritual formula that has the power to transform negative forces in the mind into positive ones. There is nothing magical about this; the mantram simply takes advantage of the fact that in negative emotions like fear and anger, the mind is always racing. In positive states like love and compassion, consciousness is calm. Whenever the mind starts to race in fear or anger, repeating the mantram puts your hands back on the wheel and your foot at the brake.

The more often you repeat the mantram, the deeper it will go. Then, whenever a negative emotion starts to rise – a wisp of anxiety or fear, a rush of anger – you can immediately start repeating your mantram in your mind. It gives the mind something to grab on to; that is the secret.

I confess to you that I never used to believe all this. I was born and brought up in a family where the Holy Name was repeated all the time, but with the modern education I had received, I too

used to think to myself, “Repeating the same word over and over again? What will that do?”

But today, after years of practice, I can assure you that when you are repeating the mantram with full attention, no negative thought can come, no oppressive fear can enter. The mantram cruises the highways of the mind like a traffic officer on a Harley-Davidson. That is the surest way of preventing the mind from wandering into strange byways where nothing but what is unpleasant waits for us.

The mantram is particularly precious for children. It is so simple it can be practiced at any age. The other day at the hospital, for example, I saw a small child being given an injection. The crying almost broke my heart.

That’s why I take every opportunity to tell mothers to teach their children to repeat the mantram at the earliest possible age. When they go to the dentist, when they feel threatened, when they hurt themselves or have nightmares, the mantram is of immense help.

A world of fear

In the deeper stages of meditation, even the bravest among us will realize what fears we all have. Every human being, the mystics tell us, lives in a world of fear. We are protected from this awareness by a merciful amnesia that hides these fears deep in consciousness. But they are always present, manifesting themselves whenever we let our minds get agitated by events around us.

Wherever there is selfish attachment, for example, there is fear. Behind attachment to money or possessions, you will always find the fear of loss. Attachment to prestige brings the nagging fear of what others think of us, what other people might be saying. The thirst for power feeds the fear that others may be stronger – not only with individuals but with nations too.

Similarly, every selfish desire brings fear: fear that we may not get what we desire, fear from the deep awareness that it is selfish and can never satisfy. We know these things in our heart, whether aware of them or not.

One could make a real Sears catalogue of these fears, but all stem from

one fatal superstition: thinking of ourselves as merely physical creatures, separate from the rest of life. A fragment cannot help feeling constantly alienated and alone, desperate for protection, always trying to shore itself up by things outside. Whatever the face they present to others and themselves, those who are acutely aware of their own separateness, their county, their state, their country, their race, are generally brittle and insecure.

The worst kind of fear, in my opinion, is fear of fear, that nameless anxiety for which no explanation can be given. It comes to all of us, and that is what often produces severe mental stress and unaccountable outbursts of anger. All of us are subject to this because we do not know who we are; we do not know what is life’s goal.

Separateness brings fear

In meditation, as your sense of oneness with the rest of life deepens, fear quietly subsides. As you learn not to get attached to personal pleasure, profit, prestige, power, and possessions, you step out of the world of fear to live in the world of love.

Finally, when you realize the divine unity in which all life is one, fear disappears. When I know that you and I are one, how can I fear you? How can you fear me? Fear goes out of your life. It is not that you don’t take precautions for your safety, but you have no sense of fear.

When we realize the unity of life, we realize that you and I have ninety-nine percent in common. Only one percent is different. But it’s not enough if we apply this truth to just a few. It’s not enough if we practice it only in our family. It is necessary to live in unity with all around us, regardless of the one-percent differences of race, creed, gender, and status that make us appear different.

Equal to any challenge

The Eight Point Program is a formula for training the mind to be equal to any challenge. When the tides of consciousness are trying to rise because of fear or greed or anger or self-will, for half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening, you slowly help them to subside. For the rest of the day, the other disciplines

help you to stay calm, compassionate, and kind.

I am not promising you that your life will not be painful. There will be people and situations to hurt you. But if you can keep your mind steady, you will not get depressed or lose your nerve. And the wonderful thing is that when your mind is at peace like this, your heart will be full of love.

If we could but see it, misfortune and trials are necessary for spiritual growth. Adversity is woven into the fabric of life; our only choice is how to face it. Through the practice of meditation, we can learn to utilize difficult circumstances and painful situations for realizing the purpose of this life: the discovery that each of us is not a separate, futile creature, but part of the eternal reality we call God.

Beyond all fear

“Do not be cowed down by sufferings,” counsels a great saint of modern India, Swami Ramdas, in a marvelous passage that I recommend for deep study and reflection. “Feel that they have a place in your life as much as anything else for which you aspire. Trials and difficulties frighten us only because we look upon them with fear and distress at heart. Accept them as they come, and by constant thought of God, overcome them. When you thus control yourself and remain unaffected by them, you will have gained no ordinary strength and courage. All your circumstances will then mold themselves for your good.”

And he concludes, very practically: “But remember one thing: let not the struggle be a source of anxiety or worry to you. Walk on the path of self-discipline with a heart filled with faith and cheer, enthusiasm and courage.”

When you live in a world of separateness, the Upanishads say, you live in a world of fear. The real world is the world of unity, where all of us are one and one is all. That is the ideal we are trying to translate into daily living. We do act upon that ideal to some extent, but when the mind gets troubled we forget it. Gradually, however, with dedicated practice, everybody can reach this state where they realize, not just in their head but in their heart, that all of us are one and one is all. ⇨

Islands of Calm

“One of the first lessons Gandhi learned in South Africa,” Sri Easwaran writes, “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.” We are pleased to share interviews with four friends who are making this discovery in very challenging jobs, drawing on the Eight Point Program every day to make themselves islands of calm in a troubled world.

Compassion in Action

Deann Lindstrom is a registered nurse in a busy county hospital in Minnesota. “Our clinic is a busy, busy place. Our patients come from all walks of life but are primarily the poor. We have such a variety of people visiting us every day. Some have appointments and some simply drop in with urgent needs. It is a blessing to have this job where I can serve the poor, the immigrants, lovely, kind people and bitter, angry people of every race and physical ability. I am certainly never bored.”

Besides coordinating with her primary care team and doctors, Deann says, “We typically have up to thirty patients scheduled between three doctors in the mornings and up to forty patients scheduled between four to six residents (physicians in training) in the afternoons. There is a constant flow of walk-in patients with varying concerns, from forms needed for financial assistance to cold symptoms or chest pain. The phones are constantly busy with patients calling in. It is a kind of chaos, but at the same time, I know what to do. I either have answers or know where to get them. I thoroughly enjoy my work.

“The Eight Point Program has certainly given me the confidence to deal

with volatile situations in the clinic. My colleagues tend to look to me to take over when a patient is seeming to get out of hand. Though it is difficult when a man or woman is attacking, I find that the best approach is with compassion.

“Usually these people are in pain – physical, social, psychological, or financial. It is rare to feel physically threatened, and for such a situation I would call security. The threat is generally verbal, with some really awful language.

“One man demanded a letter of

about his diabetes. He brought his glucose meter to learn how to use it. Prior to this he could not be bothered talking about his disease. He never mentioned the letter, but I am convinced this gesture allowed him to see the clinic in a different light.”

Deann started meditating in 1994 after discovering *Words to Live By* in a local bookstore. “The Eight Point Program is something of a miracle to me. It is the staff of my life. I am by nature timid and shy, but through meditation and the allied disciplines I am discovering other dimensions. I



Lucy Gerold (left) and her sister Deann Lindstrom (right) with Christine Easwaran at our October weeklong retreat. Lucy and Deann live in the same city and come to retreats together regularly.

recommendation so that he could get financial assistance to get an apartment. This is not an unusual request from our patients, but this man rarely attended his appointments and in fact whenever he came he was demanding something. The nurse who first encountered him told him that we could not possibly do such a letter. He became very upset. He needed a place to stay, a simple apartment, someplace secure. It was clear that he was not going to go anywhere without his letter. He took up a post in the hall outside our office area.

“So, I spoke with him and decided I could truthfully say that he attended our clinic (just not as often as we would like) and that he was known to us. Apparently this was enough. A few days later, he returned asking questions

know I will continue to be surprised by the personality unfolding within me.”

Deann depends on her mantram. “At the end of one particularly busy day,” she recalls, “I was especially agitated. I always use the mantram when walking to the bus, with varying degrees of concentration. This particular day I did not want to arrive home agitated, so I applied myself to the mantram. I managed to repeat it with concentration for most of the thirty-minute bus ride. What a difference it made in my state of mind! I was calm and ready for the evening.”

Asked about violence and the threat of war, Deann replies, “I would like to put up billboards that say, ‘Hatred can never put an end to hatred, only love can.’ I would like

*Continued
on page 7*

Continued from page 6 to write it in the sky, too. However, because of my spiritual practice, I tend not to worry about it. And though I am not terribly vocal, people know my feelings. I know it is far from the norm, but I do dream that the leaders of countries could respond to one another peacefully across the conference table.

"I am convinced that the only way I can change the world is by changing myself. It is difficult because it is a slow process. It is quiet and unobtrusive and nearly impossible to measure, unless someone says something to me. Just yesterday one of my friends told me that I never say a bad word about anyone and she admires this. I have to admit that I feel outside of many conversations because I do not participate in complaining about others. In fact, if asked, I feel compelled to find the good in that situation or person. And I can somehow do this tactfully without making the complainers feel put down by my optimism. That is certainly an effect of meditation.

"My sister, who is very successful in her career, calls me her spiritual mentor. That is exceedingly humbling. So even after only eight years of meditation and the Eight Point Program, my life is helping others."

Do unto Others

Deann's sister, Lucy Gerold, is deputy chief of police in a major metropolitan area of Minnesota, responsible for all the police functions on the south side of the city – police response and patrol, undercover operations, investigations, crime prevention, working with the community and schools. She regularly needs to deal with personnel management, angry and fearful citizens, elected officials, and situations where she might have to make an arrest or write a ticket. Carrying or dealing with guns comes with the job.

"I find the Eight Points not only helpful in dealing with fear and violence," Lucy says; "I find the points to be my lifeline, my way of being – especially the mantram and putting others first. Of course my meditation is the cornerstone. When encounter-

ing threatening situations, especially the recent threats of terrorism, I am always mindful that we are all one. I don't experience others as 'the enemy.' I am not fearful when others are. I find myself the calm voice and presence when others are saying, 'What are we going to do?' – during a hostage situation, for example. I simply don't feel threatened but in the care of the Divine."

The violence Lucy faces in her community hasn't made her more anxious about violence or the threat of war. "That feels like a waste of energy. When any fear or anxiety seems like it's creeping close, I repeat the mantram – if I am not already repeating it. I have seen many nonviolent protests against war and they bring me great hope. There is hope in the Spirit united.

"I firmly and absolutely believe in the concept of changing the world by changing ourselves. It is immensely helpful. I find this operating in my life in many ways. Through loving others for who they are and not trying to change them, they are strengthened and free to flourish. By being at peace and slowed down, I am calm and therefore help to calm things around me, especially during chaos. And through maintaining boundaries and not getting caught in gossip or triangles with others, something negative is stopped instead of perpetuated and fed."

Not a Rubber Ball

A criminal defense investigator in one of California's toughest cities, Christina Peña has the job of providing the investigation necessary for a competent, effective, and ethical defense for defendants charged with various crimes. Most of her cases are court appointed, which means working for poor people of all types.

Chris, in her twenties, is a lawyer, but she finds this job to be her calling. "I am often in very poor and heavy crime areas," she explains, "attempting to find and interview witnesses and victims of alleged crimes, photographing scenes, serving subpoenas, and

so on. I spend many hours in jails, visiting and interviewing defendants. I work closely with many different criminal defense attorneys, who are technically my clients.

"I can often be found at the hall of justice doing criminal record searches and obtaining documents in preparation for upcoming court dates. And I occasionally testify in court – for example, when a person changes their story on the stand from what they told me previously, then I am used for impeachment purposes."



Chris Peña has been meditating since she came to a retreat with her mother, Rita. Now she is involved in our Young Adult programs.

Christina doesn't look at her work as scary, though people sometimes react to it that way. "I focus on the moment and what I'm doing. Even if a situation might cause me some discomfort, I'm motivated by thinking about the person I'm trying to help. Sometimes little waves of fear pass over me and I repeat my mantram to get my focus back. But generally I don't feel afraid because I'm trying to be of service to someone who needs me."

Christina finds the mantram a lifesaver in dealing with fear or violence. She uses it constantly when she feels any fear rising up. "When I am sitting in an interview room in a jail waiting for a defendant, I repeat the mantram. It would be very easy to start imagining how scary, mean, angry, or critical that person is going to be, but I don't let myself go there. I repeat the mantram and I can step outside of the worry. The mantram has been so

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page helpful in the past that I know it works, so I use it always. It allows me to be more fully present and then able to be kind and patient. It helps me step outside of my own insecurities and to focus on the task at hand.

“Oftentimes my work takes me into what many would consider dangerous neighborhoods. I find that in addition to saying my mantram, the point of putting others first makes the fear vanish. If I start feeling worried, I think about how I am helping someone else, often someone whose very freedom is at stake. The practice of meditation makes me better able to focus my attention. By focusing on what needs to be done – for example, interviewing a witness or taking photographs – my mind is not consumed with thoughts of what bad thing might happen. Of course, I am aware of my surroundings and I don’t think I am invincible. It’s just that I am not afraid. Feeling confident in my purpose alleviates the fear of what could happen in the future.

“Also, knowing that I do not return violence or hatred for the same takes away the pressure of having to feel tough or on guard. I know that if something happens to me I can walk away, or run — as I have had to do in the past. Then I use my mantram to help calm me down and to be thankful for my safety, and thankful that I am able to escape hostile situations, unlike many who are not.

“Slowing down is another point that helps me deal with fear and potential violence. By not having the radio turned up, by not speeding, by paying close attention to my surroundings, I am better able to avoid dangerous situations.”

Practicing the Eight Point Program has helped Chris lift anxiety about the threat of violence around the world. “I feel like I am doing all I can by working on myself and helping those I interact with. I can only do my part and trust that I will be able to handle whatever comes my way.

“I know that by being more patient, attentive, and compassionate, I am directly affecting others. I am stopping the cycle of hatred and violence

in small ways. I love what Sri Easwaran says about not being a rubber ball. I try to not take things personally and to not perpetuate anger and hatred by returning it to others when they throw it my way.

“I like to consider myself a peacemaker between individuals and possibly within society. I am constantly telling defendants in custody that this is a huge life lesson in patience – a chance to examine their lives and figure out what they really want. Instead of feeding into the anger, I hope that I am helping to bring peace to people within the jails and then possibly outside of them. Most individuals really seem to respond to this and it helps stop the ‘poor me, I’m the real victim’ notion and the mentality of revenge.

“Also, by my caring so much about defendants, I show them that someone outside of their little community does care. When they see how hard I will work for them, how interested I am in their lives, maybe they feel a little hope about society in general and feel less disconnected.”

A Day-to-Day Way of Being

Nancy Clark works as a mental health nurse in one of Canada’s poorest big-city communities, helping people who are severely mentally ill. Most patients visit Nancy in her office, but part of her job requires going into areas where crime and drug activity are common, trying to help people who are living on the streets.

Though she’s often in situations where she could feel afraid, she usually doesn’t. “I have never felt unsafe walking the streets. However, I do not go into buildings on my own. I understand that the situation is getting worse with increased poverty and more drugs.” Her daily practice of the Eight Point Program acts as an inner safeguard, she says, giving her a sense of security, a confidence that she’ll be able to meet each situation with what is needed.



Nancy and Chris Clark share not only their nursing profession and a passion for running but also their spiritual life, meditating together every day and following the Eight Point Program. They travel to BMCM retreats from Canada regularly for spiritual renewal.

“I’m more conscious in my interactions with people because I do this practice,” she explains. “The energy you bring to a situation is what keeps it from spinning out of control. You bring peace into it by just being present.

“I suppose I could be scared in some situations with patients, but because I bring a certain good intention to the situation, it stays under control. Usually people pick up on your energy. They sense that you’re trying to help them and you have good intentions.”

Nancy and her husband, Chris – also a nurse – started meditating in 1993 when they found Sri Easwaran’s book *Meditation* while traveling in India. Practicing the Eight Points day in and day out, she says, helps her keep centered during her day, sensitive to people’s needs and able to deal with whatever comes up.

But the effects go farther. Asked about the larger threat of violence, Nancy replied: “The Eight Points help you to deal with what you see happening in the world. I practice meditation every day, regardless of the circumstances. I know that if I don’t do it, my day will not be the same. I truly believe this is the staff of my life. Unless we are able to control our own thoughts, how can we change violence? So I have started with myself.” ⇨

When Kids Need Inspiration

Parents and teachers have a tremendous opportunity to set positive examples for children and teach useful skills for the art of living. By using the spiritual tools of the Eight Points in our homes and schools, we can help create a spiritual atmosphere for our children to thrive in. Even better, our children can begin to discover these tools themselves.

Putting Her Students First

Kavitha Ganapathy teaches literature and writing to tenth and twelfth graders at a private school in Northern California. She shares some stories that show how Sri Easwaran's teachings and the practice of the Eight Point Program are helping her to see her students in a new light. "It has made a big difference in my life," Kavitha says. "Now, slowly, it seems to be transforming my students too."

One of these students "comes from an economically weak section of society and has a benefactor that pays for his education," Kavitha relates. "He has hurt me in many ways in the past – calling me names, using foul language, even throwing a book at me." When she tried to talk to him about respect and responsibility, he replied that he felt out of place in an affluent environment and was angry with everyone for not respecting him.

Kavitha decided she needed to know more about his background and his life. "I went to his home and spent a few hours at his tennis practices and with his circle of friends. You wouldn't believe how happy he was to see me. It was like seeing an entirely different person," Kavitha explained. The ice had been broken, but there was still a long way to go to influence this turbulent young man.

"Coincidentally, the next day we

were reading the book *The Little Prince*, a wonderful story about a boy's journey towards self-discovery. During our class discussions, I found many opportunities to tie it to Sri Easwaran's message and the Eight Point Program. Believe it or not, this boy was able to grasp the philosophy of it better than even my best student in the class. He came to me after class and wanted to discuss in depth certain themes he found interesting. I was totally amazed."

Since then, Kavitha is happy to report, he has been a diligent, respectful student – and his grades have improved tremendously.

In the same class, Kavitha needed to find a way to deal with another boy who liked to be cool. "He just loves the thrill of going against authority and gets into trouble all the time. He told me that he likes to be free and not be told what to do."

When Kavitha had the opportunity, she took him for a walk around the campus and they started discussing what freedom really means. "I told him what Sri Easwaran always talks about – not being bogged down by likes and dislikes, being alike in success and defeat, and not depending on extraneous circumstances to be happy. Though he did not buy it fully, he promised me he would try it for some time."

Soon Kavitha noticed a difference in this young man. "I was astonished to see him striving hard to go against his conditioned responses. He did not try to be the center of attention in class any more. In fact, he now cooperates and participates in class discussions." He himself noticed that he was finding school more rewarding, he confided to Kavitha, and getting along much better with others.

Kavitha's final story is about a boy who is the captain of the school basketball team – very athletic and popular, but more interested in becoming a basketball star than in his studies. Kavitha, a table tennis champion in her college days, used her personal understanding of competition plus her experience with meditation to find a way to reach him.

"This student felt that his time in the

classroom was a complete waste, that he was cut out for something big in life and literature had nothing to do with his goals. So, needless to say, he was quite indifferent in my class, distracting himself and others. In a nutshell, he was the student every teacher dreads to have in class."

Kavitha wanted to get a clearer perspective on how to reach him. "I decided to watch his basketball games and observe him in a different light. He was so focused, intense, and concentrated on the court that it seemed like he had two different personalities."

Basketball was the key. "I mentioned to him one day after practice that if he wanted to be a great sportsman, he needs to look at the interconnectedness of each and every one of his actions. He could not possibly hope to develop his sense of concentration on the court if he is distracted in class. I brought out the importance of nutritious food, good sleep habits, exercise, focus, and so on. All are essential and are linked to making a champion, and nothing is in compartments."

Kavitha admits that he wasn't convinced at first. He was hesitant, afraid of doing a lot of unnecessary work. But eventually he decided to test it out. "He now actually enjoys participating in class and does the reading assignments," Kavitha concludes, "since he has a truly big goal in mind."

Creating Calm in the Classroom

Dorothy Pierce of New York, who works as a sixth-grade teacher, shares a story that shows how the mantram can be effective in creating an atmosphere of calm. "Sixth graders are mostly sweet and orderly," she explains, "but there are times when they are not, like right after coming in from the playground. I began to use this time to repeat the mantram to keep myself from ordering the students to sit down, be quiet, get busy, and generally get the afternoon off in a negative fashion. Using the mantram was more positive.

"So when they burst in the classroom door with

*Continued
on next page*

Continued from 'outdoor' voices, expressing previous page

loud elation or indignation about something that happened outside, I would simply stand in the front of the room, close my eyes, and silently repeat the mantram for a few minutes. Then we would proceed with the afternoon activities.

"It usually took several minutes for peace and abiding calm to prevail, so I was surprised one day when the effect was instant. 'Well, this mantram is really doing its job today!' I thought. And so I went with it, kept my eyes closed, repeated the mantram several more times.

"Imagine my surprise when I opened my eyes to meet the eyes of my principal! We were literally eyeball to eyeball. And the kids had never been so quiet. All their eyes were on the two of us. 'What will happen now?' they must have wondered.

"And nothing did happen that was apparent. The principal simply spoke about the issue he came in to address and calmly walked away. I can only believe that my repetition of the mantram that day benefited not just me but twenty-five sixth graders and a frazzled, harried, overly busy principal. The mantram is great!"

A Universal Tool

The mantram is a stabilizer," Sri Easwaran says in *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, "the kind that enables ships to steer through rough seas and keep on an even keel."

This power makes the mantram one of the greatest gifts we can give our children, because it is a tool they can use for themselves. "I think of the mantram as a universal tool that helps you with everything," says Chris Cormier, a junior in high school in California. "When you are angry it calms you down, when you are scared it gives you comfort, when you are sad it is there to cheer you up."

Chris met Sri Easwaran at the age of four and says he has used his mantram faithfully ever since. He tells of several instances where the mantram helped him to find courage in scary and difficult situations.

"In the summer of 1995 I was watching a TV show, one of those police reenactment stories which are so real, and I got terribly frightened. I was so terrified that I started to cry. So that night I wrote a letter to Sri Easwaran. The very next day I got a reply. He told me that I should keep a picture of Gandhi in my room and remember that he was afraid of the dark and yet grew up to be the most fearless person. Saying the mantram isn't just saying some words; it is protection that no one can take away from you."

Many years ago, Chris discovered that spiritual teachings can give comfort in a time of grief. "When I was in third grade, I had a friend who was a quiet and great kid. He ended up getting really sick and went into a coma. The first thing that my family did was write Sri Easwaran a letter asking him what we should do. He told us that we should say the mantram for our friend. So I said the mantram over and over again. I thought that the mantram was going to bring him out of his coma, that it was going to be like a secret weapon."

Chris was devastated when his friend didn't come out of the coma, but he'll never forget what Sri Easwaran told him. "Easwaran told us that it was my friend's time, but that he wasn't dying – he was just taking off his jacket, and in his next life he will be born into a better life. I do know that saying all those *Ramas* helped him pass from this life into his next."

Nathan's Story

Sonja Rohde, the mother of three and a nurse in Northern California, tells us how important the mantram is to her whole family. "All my children use the mantram a great deal, especially at night before they go to bed, when they wake up scared, when they get teased by other kids, and so on. They even tell us to use the mantram sometimes when they see we are upset or worried about something. It has really penetrated their lives."

When he was in a hostile incident at school, her son Nathan, only in kindergarten, used the mantram to

transform the situation. Nathan's kindergarten teacher, Ellyn Morrison, tells the following story.

"It was the first week of school and at least thirty children were in the playground after kindergarten was over for the day. It seems that Nathan and another boy were in the sandbox when Nathan may have stepped on the other boy's project, disturbing his play. The other boy was considered to be not a bully but a sweet kid. So when he started yelling at Nathan, everyone was surprised. The other boy said some things that really shocked everybody – something like, 'I'm going to chop your head off!' – while waving around some kind of stick. It was so bad that even Nathan's older sister got scared.

"At some point during this exchange Nathan sat down on a log and started repeating his mantram. The other boy got curious and asked Nathan what he was doing. Nathan told him all about the mantram and how to use it. At the end of their conversation, Nathan actually gave the little boy a mantram to use.

"I wasn't on the playground when all of this happened, but I heard about it. So a few days later I asked, 'Nathan, could you point out to me the boy that you had the fight with? It is important that we talk to him so we can be friends again.'

"Nathan replied, 'Oh, that's all right. I don't need to talk to him. I'm not afraid of him now. We play together and we're friends.'

"Well," I replied, 'sometimes it is a good idea to talk and work things out.'

"We don't need to work anything out. I'm fine,' Nathan replied. 'I repeated my mantram when I got afraid, and then I wasn't afraid any more.'"

Ellyn, an experienced teacher, was quite impressed with this reply. "Children don't usually hold a grudge," she explained, "but they can be fearful when something like this happens. Nathan was only five years old, so I was delighted with this outcome."

Sonja tells of another incident when Nathan was threatened, this time by serious illness, and the mantram came to the help of the whole family.

“Nathan was fine – we were at a concert of my daughter Julia’s – when suddenly he became feverish. We thought it was strange, but we just let him lie down in our lap.

By the end of the concert he was burning, his eyes were glazed over, and he couldn’t hold his head up. So we took him home and called the doctor. He said, ‘Just treat the fever.’

“That night the fever shot up to 104 or 105. He was throwing up violently and he couldn’t keep anything down. And his head was just killing him. In the morning, my husband Chris started to give him cold ice baths so he wouldn’t have convulsions. Nathan was using his mantram a lot; that was the only way he could get into the bathtub. He was saying his mantram and Chris was helping him, and they got his fever back down to about 104.

“Then we just took him to the hospital. At that point, he was so sick I had to carry him. He couldn’t hold his head up and his neck was killing him. He just couldn’t get rid of the headache. They brought him into the emergency room at the hospital where I work and gave him IV medication right away. The doctor who was on tested his white cell count, which was huge, so he decided to put him on some extremely strong antibiotics without testing for anything further. So we still didn’t know what was wrong.

“They had no beds open, so I took him home for a few hours. The antibiotics helped, so that he wasn’t throwing up, but by morning the fever was back, everything was back, and he was in bad shape again. So I took him back to the emergency room.

“This time, they tested him for meningitis. He was positive for it.

“During the whole time the mantram really helped Nathan. He thought he was going to die, he felt so bad. He said to me, ‘Mom, am I going to die?’

“I was crying and I said, ‘No, Nathan, you’re not going to die.’ I just knew deep down that he wasn’t going to die, but I knew he was very, very sick.

So I would switch back and forth. He wanted to hear both, and he loves both of them.

“He just needed the mantram the whole time, and it really transformed him. It really, really calmed him down. He didn’t even get nervous when they were starting the IVs and doing the spinal tap. They told him what they were going to do to him. It was just one doctor after another.

“Gradually, he started to get better. The doctors were not able to figure out if it was viral or bacterial meningitis. Because they had given him those antibiotics the first night, they couldn’t grow whatever was affecting him. It was almost impossible to figure out, but it was

probably viral because his lab results improved at a fairly fast rate. But it took a couple of months before he really felt better.

“It showed me that in Nathan’s worst hour, he had somewhere to turn, the Holy Name, and it had great benefit for him and for us, his family. It also showed us how devoted he is to Sri Easwaran and the great blessings Easwaran gave us in his teachings.” ⇨

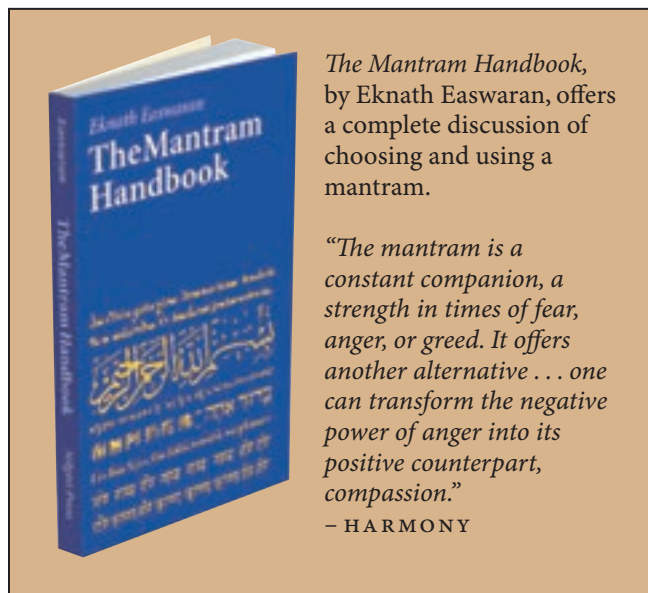


Nathan Bell loves singing his mantram, which has become a faithful friend to him and a source of support for his whole family.

“He said to me, ‘Mom, just say my mantram for me.’ He was so sick he didn’t even have the energy to talk. So I kept whispering in his ear, because they had the rest of his body – they were poking him, starting IVs on one arm and taking blood out of the other, with all these lines on him to check his heart rate, his respiration, everything.

“During all of this he never complained. The nurses just couldn’t believe it. ‘He is really special. He’s not screaming like twelve-year-olds scream when we do this to them.’ If I stopped saying the mantram, he would say, ‘Keep saying it, Mom.’

“I grew up Buddhist, so my mantram is *Om mani padme hum*. But Nathan loves *Rama*, because *Rama* is somebody he can relate to. He knows all of the stories about *Rama*.



The Mantram Handbook, by Eknath Easwaran, offers a complete discussion of choosing and using a mantram.

“The mantram is a constant companion, a strength in times of fear, anger, or greed. It offers another alternative . . . one can transform the negative power of anger into its positive counterpart, compassion.”

– HARMONY