



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-seven 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.

Invitation to a Journey

By Eknath Easwaran

NOT LONG AGO, a young forty-foot humpback whale on his way to Alaska became enticed by the lure of San Francisco. He veered off course into the bay, and once inside, instead of deciding he had made a wrong turn and retracing his wake, he chose to push on to Sacramento. By the time I learned of his plight, he had worked his way into fresh waters and got trapped in the shallows of the Sacramento River Delta — a most uncongenial environment for any salt-water creature, but practically a bathtub for one used to thousands of miles of open sea.

Humphrey, as reporters dubbed him, immediately became a media sensation. Every day, news services carried updates on his predicament around the world, while hundreds of whale-lovers flocked to San Francisco to help the Coast Guard try to rescue him. But Humphrey just kept swimming up blind alleys.

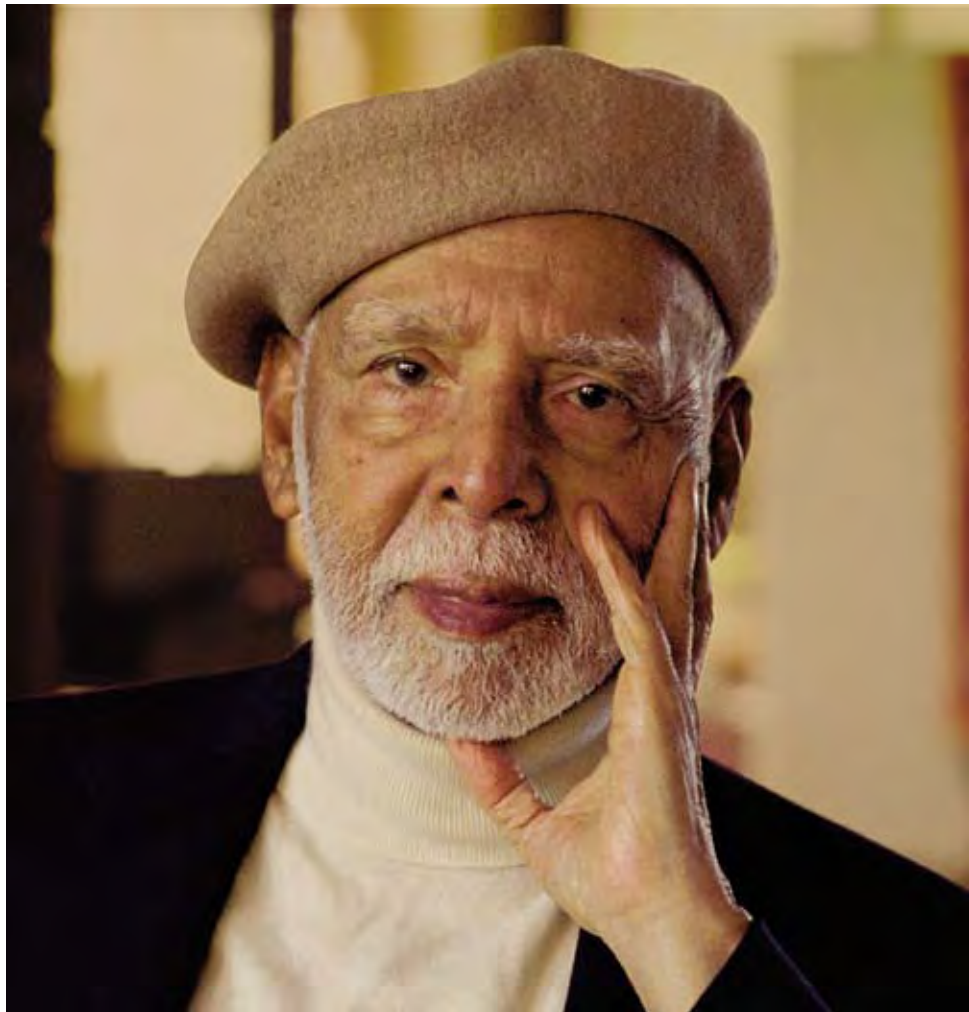
Finally someone hit on the idea of luring him back to the sea by the call of recorded whale songs. Humphrey began leaping joyfully, splashing great sheets of water to the delight of spectators, and

churned toward the open ocean at a good thirty miles an hour. Traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge backed up in both directions as fans got out of their cars to crowd at the rails and cheer. They paid handsome fines, but as one woman told reporters, “It was worth every penny.”

Something in all of us cheers when a captive creature breaks free. We are born for freedom, even if we don't understand what that means or how to find it. Somehow we sense that we are not meant to spend our lives in the shallows of pleasure and profit. We are made for vast spaces, to reach beyond boundaries until, as an English mystic put it, we are “clothed with the heavens and crowned with the

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Below, from our archives: Eknath Easwaran, 1997



Eknath Easwaran's commentaries for *Blue Mountain* are drawn from the thousands of previously unpublished talks and writings in the Blue Mountain archives — part of an ongoing effort to make his teaching freely available around the world.

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1 Invitation to a Journey



“We are born for freedom, even if we don't understand what that means or how to find it.”

writes Easwaran. He invites us to break free of old limitations and discover our full human potential.

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Having identified two unwanted habits, Rollie M. found an ideal meditation passage for overcoming

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Blue Mountain Center of Meditation

The Center offers instruction 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 of Passage Meditation

1. MEDITATION ON A PASSAGE Silent repetition in the mind of memorized inspirational passages from the world's great religions. Practiced for one-half hour each morning.

2. REPETITION OF A MANTRAM Silent repetition in the mind of a Holy Name or a hallowed phrase from one of the world's great religions. Practiced whenever possible throughout the day or night.

3. SLOWING DOWN Setting priorities and reducing the stress and friction caused by hurry.

4. ONE-POINTED ATTENTION Giving full concentration to the matter at hand.

5. TRAINING THE SENSES Overcoming conditioned habits and learning to enjoy what is beneficial.

6. PUTTING OTHERS FIRST Gaining freedom from selfishness and separateness; finding joy in helping others.

7. SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP Spending time regularly with others following the Eight Point Program for mutual inspiration and support.

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

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.

Peace Begins with Me



Christine Easwaran

PASSAGE MEDITATION is unique to Easwaran. It is a method he developed for training the mind that can be used to improve the quality of life or to explore the deepest dimensions of the human spirit. It can take us from our finite, fragmented existence to the unitary state described by mystics of all ages and climes – to the world beyond the senses, beyond the physical.

In an early mission statement, Easwaran spoke of “bringing the ancient art of meditation out of the cloister into the modern world.” His dream was to bring about a spiritual renaissance. He taught that ordinary people can change the world by first making changes in their own lives that influence their family, their associates, their community.

St. Francis is an example he often used of an ordinary person, the “poor little man of Assisi,” who lived to turn the tide of medieval Europe. Another example that Easwaran used is Gandhi, a young, failed lawyer who drew upon the noblest virtues in himself and in his fellow men to free his country from British rule without firing a shot. These people believed that peace begins in the human heart. To find that peace, Easwaran recommended his eight point program of passage meditation.

Christine Easwaran

For the Board of Trustees

What Is the Origin of Passage Meditation?

Eknath Easwaran developed passage meditation at the peak of a successful career in India. He was a popular professor of English literature, a well-known essayist in national newspapers, and a highly sought-after public speaker. But in early mid-life he was haunted by questions no worldly fulfillment could quiet: “Is this all there is? What is life for? Why am I here?”

No doubt many factors in Easwaran’s early years prompted these persistent questions. In his childhood in a traditional Hindu village he received the grace of his remarkable grandmother, whom he later looked upon as his spiritual teacher. In his youth he was profoundly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, who had transformed himself through immersion in the scriptures.

Then, one morning on the Blue Mountain in South India a sad incident triggered a life-changing experience which led eventually to his method of passage meditation.

Returning from a walk he found his pet dog had been run over by a passing truck and killed. This affected him deeply. Somehow she stood for death itself, for all those he had loved and admired who had passed away – his beloved grandmother, a young friend his own age, Mahatma Gandhi – and for all the rest who would follow. Easwaran turned to the scriptures for consolation. He sat down, closed his eyes, and verses from the Bhagavad Gita he had memorized as a boy came into his mind, totally absorbing his attention. His grief must have opened a trapdoor in consciousness, for he lost all awareness of time passing. He had touched another world, a state of profoundest peace.

Nourished by the experience, he began repeating this practice daily, even after returning to a busy schedule on his campus in Central India. In the following years, periods of struggle were intermittently rewarded with deep peace. Eventually he became established in that unshakable state of mind described in the verses he used in meditation: “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. . . . Such are the Seers.”

A born teacher, he instinctively set about systematizing his method of meditation to make it easier for others to follow. After coming to the U.S. on the Fulbright exchange program in 1959, Easwaran had many opportunities to present the wisdom of India’s spiritual tradition. Out of these encounters with Western audiences grew the refinement of his method into a complete program of eight practices.

Passage meditation emerged as an answer to Easwaran’s questions. It is now followed around the world. Earnest men and women from all walks of life demonstrate its benefits while leading active lives in the midst of their families and communities.

Continued from page 1 stars.” We are born with intimations of a potential much, much grander than anything we can dream of in the day-to-day world.

A higher vantage

While Humphrey’s story was unfolding in the daily news, we human viewers had the advantage of a higher dimension. We could look at maps, watch aerial views on TV, and see the scene whole: the narrow confines of the river delta, the broader bay with its narrow passage in and out, the vast expanse of ocean that Humphrey needed to find. To us it seemed so simple what to do.

But Humphrey had no access to that higher view. All he could have known was that an interesting side trip had turned into a trap. It’s easy to imagine how he must have felt as he found himself alone and boxed in, with no sense of where to turn for help in a situation he could not understand.

I spent years of my early life in what seemed a very similar predicament. At that time I had not the slightest interest in the spiritual life. My days were full with a job I loved, teaching English literature at a great university in India. I had begun to make a reputation as a writer; I had friends with whom to enjoy music and tennis and the quiet pleasures of good company; everything I wanted was flowing into my hands. It was a very satisfying situation. If I had had time to think about it, I would have assured you I was happy.

Instead, I found increasingly that on some other level – not physical, not emotional, but within my heart – I felt

starved for meaning. Old, old questions began to come unbidden at wakeful hours of the night: Why am I here? What is life for? What happens when I die?

Nothing in my education had prepared me for such questions. Nothing I read could answer them for me. Only

that are universal – ideals that appeal regardless of culture, tradition, or creed.

This method has two characteristics. The first is training attention: learning to focus your mind completely where you choose. This is the essence of genius, but it is not something one

must be born with; it is a skill anyone can learn. Nothing is more practical. When you can direct attention wherever you like, you can do unpleasant jobs with enthusiasm, listen without agitation to criticism when necessary, and stay calm, kind, and clear-headed in a crisis.

Once this kind of sustained concentration becomes natural, it begins to draw together the scattered threads of what one thinks, feels, says, and does. When you do something with a focused mind, you are completely present – not partly ruminating on the past, partly worried about the future, and currently dis-

tracted, as is so common in the rush of modern life. In meditation, when concentration is complete, conflicts resolve, bringing about the complete integration of personality.

The second aspect of passage meditation derives from the passages themselves – or, rather, from the power that comes from sustained concentration when the words open their doors and release their meaning. I can find no better way to put it. The experience is not intellectual, and I am not talking about dictionary definitions; the truths the passages express simply become part of your life, assimilated into your character and consciousness

The Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

To be consoled as to console,

To be understood as to understand,

To be loved as to love;

For it is in giving that we receive;

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.

when I discovered meditation could I find the higher vantage I needed to see life whole – and that discovery opened the door to a way of life so much more fulfilling that my days before seem like a dream.

Meditation on a passage

The method of meditation I developed became known as “passage meditation” because it consists in slow, sustained attention on the words of inspired passages that embody ideals for a higher mode of living. The Prayer of St. Francis (see box) is a perfect example of such a passage: positive, practical, and inspiring, it expresses ideals

just as the nutrients in food become part of your body.

If you are meditating on the words of St. Francis of Assisi, for example – “grant that I may not so much seek to be loved as to love” – then that is how you begin to live. Repeated experiences like this bring a sea change in personality, a complete transformation of character, conduct, and consciousness. In the simplest possible language, this is the secret of meditation: we become what we meditate on.

I want to reassure you that none of this happens unless you desire it. No unwanted changes are likely to take place. All that happens is that the loftier desires of the heart grow stronger and stronger when nurtured by the wisdom in these words. “Deep calls unto deep”: that is the essence of passage meditation.

The world within

When concentration in meditation is complete, the words of the passage fill one’s consciousness, just as the impressions of the senses do during the day.

Teresa of Avila calls this entering an “interior castle.” Wonderful things await us there, she says, but we never bother to look in. We may not even know we have a castle; we spend our lives hanging out in the courtyard, enjoying the brief hours of sun, suffering when it rains.

The simile is perfect. Yet when I was first learning to meditate, I often felt just the opposite too, as if I had been spending my life cramped indoors and just discovered the real world.

Imagine living in one little room all your life! You would forget what the outdoors was like. Gradually you would come to believe there is no such thing; only your room is real. That’s why I say I felt like Humphrey escaping into the sea. Early every morning, while the rest of the world slept, I would open the door of consciousness in meditation, slip inside, and set about homesteading the world within.

World mysticism

Always a reader, I turned to books to get my bearings in this inner realm. Instead of philosophy and psychology, however, I turned to the world’s mystics – men and women like Mahatma Gandhi, Francis of Assisi, and Teresa of Avila, who had undertaken this journey and written not from theory or speculation, but from personal experience.

I read widely, drawing no distinction between East and West; I cared only whether the testimonies were authentic. I discovered the Upanishads, and through them my own Indian heritage; Patanjali’s classic text on meditation, the *Yoga Sutras*, helped greatly in providing the framework my intellectual training required. I read the Catholic mystics, the Buddhist scriptures, the passionate poetry of the Sufis. I discovered that religion has nothing to do with dogma, theology, or anything else that divides; religion is realization: making the truths of the world’s great scriptures a reality in daily life.

Aldous Huxley’s *Perennial Philosophy*, with its selection of personal testimonies from mystics of all religions, provided my first glimpse that the voyage I had embarked on was not unique but universal. Throughout history, I discovered, men and women of all faiths and backgrounds had stumbled onto a hidden path that led back to this same heartland of the spirit within.

Those paths varied according to creed and culture, but the journey was the same, and all the paths converged on the same land. “The mystics must come from the same country,” Evelyn Underhill wrote, “for they all speak the same language.” That was what Huxley meant by a “perennial philosophy”: the experiential discovery that underlying the world of change lies a changeless reality that can be realized by any man or woman willing to make the effort.

In this way I discovered other voices, in beautiful passages for meditation from every major spiritual tradition. Often they were the voices of monastics, but I found a few who, like me, had chosen not to withdraw into monasteries but to seek a higher reality right in the midst of everyday affairs. I had found a way to bring the ancient art of meditation out of the cloister into daily life.

Daily living

One of the first discoveries I made when setting out on this journey was that meditation was a kind of bridge between this world within and the everyday world I dealt with during the day. I found a deep connection between the wisdom in those passages and the way I conducted myself at home and work. It was a thrilling discovery. Certain skills, such as slowing down and focusing on one thing at a time, deepened my concentration during meditation, and in turn that brought depth to whatever I did during the rest of the day. The passages were lifelines, guiding me to the source of wisdom deep within and then guiding me back into daily life.

Once I made this connection, I began to work on my life as systematically as a professional athlete. I am a very ordinary person; I had no difficulty finding weaknesses that needed correction.

To take just one illustration, I had a few habits that could charitably be called self-centered. In fact, they were disrupting my life. And I had never been able to shake them off. For one thing, I liked to think they weren’t really all that bad.

As the words I was meditating on took root in my consciousness, however, they gradually ran deeper than those habits. Then I could look up and see my precious foibles were no more than weeds preventing some beautiful qualities from blossoming. And that brought the will to

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pull them out. Some even withered away of their own accord, simply because they were no longer getting nourished by my attention. Meditation on passages was unifying my life.

All this time I was continuing a very full life at the university, with a heavy load of classes accompanied by administrative duties and a good deal of time given over to students every evening. Making time for meditation was a challenge, but I was benefitting from it so much I made it my first priority. I gave myself one simple rule: “Put meditation first.”

Invitation to a journey

The media lost interest in Humphrey once he escaped. But I like to imagine how it must have felt to be free at last, charging out under the Golden Gate Bridge deaf to the cheers of earth-bound creatures above him, into the open sea where he belonged.

There’s not much to the continental shelf in northern California, and whales swim fast. Within a few minutes Humphrey would have been in mile-deep waters again, with half a planet of open ocean to roam in as he pleased.

Then, free to go wherever he chose, he must instead have felt a silent command: “North. Go north. Go home.” No details, no map, no companions, no guide, just a direction and a desire in response to an overriding imperative from within: go home.

It is very much like that on the journey of meditation too. Once you turn inward, the words of the passages urge you forward in response to a summons from the very depths of the heart.

This need to return to the source of our being is nothing less than an evolutionary imperative – the drive to realize our full human potential. As Meister Eckhart says, “Whether you like it or not, whether you know it or not, secretly Nature seeks and hunts and tries to ferret out the track in

which God may be found.” Something deep within us must find expression beyond the plane of pleasure and profit; that is our glory as human beings.

We need a higher dimension than physical existence to understand our need to find a place in the world. Beyond the familiar plane of biological and emotional needs lies a third dimension of spiritual needs that cannot be denied: the need for meaning, a purpose for living, a place in the fabric of life where we belong.

Because this dimension is part of our very being, we live inescapably in two worlds, the material and the spiritual. To live fully means being at home in both these realms, and that requires a way to bring the deep wisdom of the heart into daily life.

There are many reasons today why

one might choose to meditate – health, concentration, reduced anxiety, deeper relationships, security, serenity, the creative resources for making a lasting contribution. Meditation can help you attain all these goals – or, rather, it provides the path; you will need to do the traveling yourself.

But the path leads much, much farther – as far as you want to go. It opens onto a journey that is literally without end, since its goal is only the beginning of a fully human life.

The journey holds challenges enough for the most daring adventurer, wonders and treasures that would make Marco Polo’s accounts of Cathay trivial by comparison. It is, without exaggeration, the adventure of a lifetime. If challenges appeal to you and meaning and purpose are what you seek, I warmly invite you to join me. ⇨

Basic Instructions in Passage Meditation

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

Support from Within

THAT CLIENT'S network went down again, and he says if we can't fix it right now, they're ripping out all of our products and putting in the competitors'!"

This is the kind of greeting that sometimes awaits Diane C. when she arrives at work, before she has had a chance to remove her coat. An engineer in one of the world's largest technology firms, she fields requests for help all day long from frontline troubleshooters, who also refer some of the thorniest cases to her.

Diane's employer manufactures electronic devices that allow a firm's various functions to communicate with one another – in a worldwide shipping company, for example. A breakdown can grind operations to a halt, bringing a great deal of pressure to bear on the person in charge of setting things aright. By the time the call is forwarded to Diane, she hears everything from anger to tears to desperation. With a sympathetic smile, she remembers, "Once I got a call from a man who said, 'If I don't get this fixed – today – I'm going to get fired. And it's my birthday.'

"There are always opportunities for working with people who are confused, frustrated, upset," she says. "Doing this kind of job well requires the ability not to put up a barrier that just bounces someone's negative

energy back at them. You have to be able to hear 'I need help' – no matter what package it comes wrapped in."

When Diane started this job seven years ago – at the same time she took up Easwaran's eight point program of passage meditation – she already had some training and experience in dealing with charged situations. "But back

ticed focusing her attention on the silent, deliberate repetition of the words of an inspirational passage, bringing her mind back whenever extraneous thoughts or feelings distracted her. Gradually, she began to strengthen her ability to keep her mind calm and concentrated: an essential skill for her work.

"When a call comes in, because the clients think I'm not going to take the time to listen, they say everything really fast, spew it all out in a hurry," she says. "I try to slow them down so I can get to the heart of what they're saying and collect whatever data I need. I'll say, 'Okay, let me take this one piece at a time, because I want to make sure I understand.'"

If the conversation is still too rapid-fire or emotional for good communication, Diane reassures them more explicitly. "Look, I'm not going to let this issue go until it's fixed," she tells the client. "It may take an hour. It may take five days. I don't know. But you and I are going to

work it out until it's resolved."

Keeping that promise, though, can require a lot of stamina and the motivation to remain poised through turbulent moments – day after day after day. For that reason, what she's meditating *on* plays a central role.

"The first passage that many of us learn is the St. Francis Prayer. For me, it represents an ideal that is the core of how I want to live my life: if somebody needs something, let me be a conduit to get it to them, if at all possible. It's about looking past whatever the particular emotion of the moment is, rather than getting sucked into reacting to it, and saying, 'Maybe there's something I can offer.'" *Continued page 9*



"Sometimes lines from a passage will come up in my mind during the course of my day," says Diane, "but more than that, the passages inspire the choices I make all day long: how I eat, how I get to work in the morning, how I think about what's important."

then I just had a vague desire to be a better person. Now I have a much better sense of why I want to interact with people in a compassionate way, and a very direct set of tools for doing that."

Turning things around

"If you ask someone about their experience with tech support," says Diane, "chances are they'll say it stinks. It's frustrating, no one's listening, someone's reading from a script. And that's what most people expect when they call. What I really enjoy is the challenge of changing their minds."

To face that challenge, she began by working on her own mind. Starting each day with meditation, she prac-

Passing Up the Baton

Four tips for staying slowed down in a speeded-up workplace

At Diane's company, the clients aren't the only ones under stress.

As soon as she addresses one problem, she faces a seemingly endless stream of other demands. Some are urgent in-person appeals. Others come via various blinking, beeping, ringing things: instant messages, e-mail, phone, cellphone. And, being in a cubicle, she contends with the constant noise pulsing out from the workstations surrounding her.

But more than the sounds, it's the free-floating urgency and anxiety that strike her most. "After my morning meditation, when I'm good and slowed down, it can be very jarring to walk into an environment that's good and speeded up," she says. "I used to believe that helping people meant joining in: that if you come to me all speeded up, I should grab that speeded-up baton and run with it. But I don't believe that any more.

"Being open to the needs of the people around me without getting into the swirl – that's my biggest challenge every day," she says. "But when I can do that, I'm much more effective." She shares four of her strategies below.

1. Letting the mouse go

"It's a very interrupt-driven kind of a job, and when I'm tired or it's the end of the day, I can really get scattered. I'll catch myself half-responding to an e-mail, then looking at an instant message, then talking to someone.

"So I decided that when people came to my desk, I was going to turn my chair completely away from my computer and pay attention to them. And if I couldn't do that, I had to work on saying, 'Would you come back in ten minutes? I really need to get this done.'

"I started practicing this, but then I realized that though my chair was swiveled away from my computer, I was holding on to the mouse. My hand – and part of my mind – was still turned in the other direction. So now I'm working on that."

Such little habits, but they can prove quite tenacious. "My hand really doesn't want to just sit in my lap. The more I practice, though, the easier it is to remember." And as she reclaims these little strands of attention, her focus becomes stronger. "That's what helps me do my job better, and people know that I'm really listening."

2. Spotting warning signs

On a hard day, especially as the afternoon wears on, concentration can get frayed. "I didn't use to realize it for hours, but now I can sometimes tell in ten minutes: uh oh. It's an anxious, agitated feeling. I can't focus on any one thing because there are so many things to do.

"That's almost always a clue that I've been working for too

long without a break. But because of that sense of so many things needing my attention, it can be hard to pull myself out of that mode. Also, we have a culture that wants us at our desk, and just with the sheer volume of work, it takes conscious effort to give myself permission to get up and go for a mantram walk outside, even for ten or fifteen minutes.

"But when I come back, I can make a better decision: this one thing deserves my attention right now."

3. Being an agent of change

A work culture, however, isn't carved in stone, and Diane takes advantage of opportunities to change it. "People come to me with so much on their mind that they can't even say hello. They'll be 15 things deep into 'this thing is doing this and that thing is doing that and what are we supposed to do. . . ' I'll flat out stop them and smile and say, 'Well, good morning!' Now they joke about the fact that I make them at least say hello."

And because she's responsible for training the 25 people on her team, Diane has many other chances to invest in a better work climate. "I tell them, 'Look, you're going to hear a lot about how great it is to do four things at once, and I'm going to tell you that it's not all it's cracked up to be.'

"I say, 'If you're talking to a customer on the phone, I want them to feel that they're the only call you have today. Listen carefully, not just to what they're saying, but to what they're not saying.' And the people on my team respond to that."

4. Keeping a goal in view

"I think part of what makes people feel comfortable is knowing that they can expect the same thing from me on any given day – that I will always at least try to help. But if you're going with the flow in a hyper-energy environment, you can wear out pretty quickly. For me, it used to cycle into getting angry, tired, sick.

"I don't want anyone to feel like 'Diane the Unpredictable has gone off the deep end this week, so we can't rely on her.' So although consistency can seem undervalued, that persistence for the long haul is something I consciously strive for quite a lot. Then even when I'm tired or things keep going wrong or I can't fix somebody's technical issue, at least I walk in at the beginning of the day knowing what I want to bring to my work.

"When we receive job performance feedback, I often get comments like, 'I know I can always count on Diane to help me, even when she's busy.' So that lets me know my effort to be consistent means something to people.

"It makes a big difference to *me* in the joy I feel. I have a deeper sense of satisfaction in my job and in my life." ⇨

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It's not that the passages insulate her from ever getting upset. "There are moments when I think, 'I don't want to hear one more thing about how somebody can't get what they need.' I hit a certain frustration level, then they push a button that gets some kind of reaction in me," she says. "But meditation is a way to work on keeping whatever emotional response I happen to be experiencing from influencing what comes out of my mouth.

"When I was more speeded up, my mind could spin on an upsetting event all day long. But now, unless I'm on the deep end of exhausted, I almost always have the capability to catch it and slow it down much sooner. With a difficult client it's much easier to say to myself, 'Okay, here's somebody who's really frustrated.' In a way, that challenges the part of me that wants to change their mind.

"And once people really get the

message that I'm not letting go of their problem until it's fixed, the whole way that they interact with me changes. They slow down. They listen better. And they're just nicer. Then I have the opportunity to say, 'I want you to try this one step and let's see what that does.'"

Then Diane often watches a cycle of stress come to a close. "At the end, they're very thankful. I often get feedback like 'I really appreciate your support' or 'I know I can count on you.' If you can take people's frustration and transform it," says Diane, "you see their attitudes change right there. Seeing that difference is a tremendous support in my day."

Working from underneath

"I used to think that being smart was where it's at: the be-all-end-all," says Diane. "And a good intellect *is* useful – up to a point. But there's something beyond that.

"You can do a lot with conscious

effort, but there are some things that you have to work on from underneath. Meditating on passages affirms at a deep level how I want to live my life: what I'm choosing to do with my energy, my money, my time.

"When I notice I'm acting in a new way and I haven't really consciously thought about it – that's something coming from underneath. I may be working on eating healthier or exercising more, but suddenly I see that I'm having a difficult conversation without getting agitated. I'm listening better. I'll realize that I want to be of more service to people, so I'll notice an opportunity where I didn't see one before.

"When you take something in at that deep level, over and over and over again, it slowly becomes part of who you are. Those passages are sort of mine now. No matter what happens, no matter where I am in life, no matter what kind of chaos is going on in my day, I can take their wisdom and inspiration with me." ⇨

A Prescription for Effective Thinking

I WOULDN'T SAY my life is less busy than it was ten years ago," says Rollie M., "but I enjoy it much more."

Just as he did before taking up a regular practice of passage meditation a decade ago, Rollie continues to "wear many hats." At work, he serves a large number of legal clients, as well as taking on whatever administrative duties are needed to keep the small firm going. And with three of his five children living at home, Rollie still starts some days by arbitrating disputes

about bathroom space and ends them by offering guidance on the ups and downs of high-school life. He continues to look after an elderly father and still tries to carve out time for his friends and community.

Yet he no longer feels that he has to scramble to keep up or resign himself to merely reacting to situations beyond his control. "Before coming across Easwaran, I had never looked at the connection between concentration and our mental states. But once I started meditating and experienced having a calmer mind during the day, I definitely wanted to reproduce that," says Rollie. "Unifying my attention is something I now work on every day."

At his last Blue Mountain Center retreat in October, Rollie identified two troublesome thought patterns that were dividing his attention. Since then, he's been working on reclaiming that

focus and directing it to the benefit of his clients, his family, and the other people in his life.

Spying two patterns

An attorney, Rollie devotes most of his work time to representing people with Social Security disability claims. "They come to me after they've been turned down at the initial level, and I take them through an appeals process," he explains. "The majority of my clients are in great financial distress, so if we are successful, it makes a huge difference for them."

The stakes are high, and staying on track is important – but not easy. "Often, my clients are in physical pain, and some are suffering mentally from impairments or more serious illnesses. They've been through a lot, and when they come to see me, they're usually agitated in one way or

Continued
on next page

Continued from previous page another. They really want to tell their story, and I want to give them their due. But I have a limited amount of time for each case, so it's a difficult balance. If they're going on and on about something irrelevant to their appeal, it doesn't help them if I listen very politely and they end up losing."

Even though Rollie could see the importance of redirecting the conversation, doing so was uncomfortable – and sometimes unappreciated. When it was clear he was going to have to interrupt, part of his mind would continue listening and another part would start lamenting "Oh, not again!"

This "inward groaning," as he calls it, didn't seem to be such a noteworthy discovery until he began to observe its effects. Those negative thoughts were like a heavy weight dragging behind him – draining him of mental energy he could invest in making situations better.

And once he spotted this pattern, he was surprised to see it crop up in other areas of his life quite often. That insight gave him further motivation to change his thinking.

The second pattern was anxiety. "The flip side of doing a lot of good for clients when we win is that it can be devastating for them if we lose. I accept that I'm not perfect – I can make mistakes and I can't win every case – but I really have to stay on top of everything. Right now, for example, the cases are coming into the hearings fast and furious. There's no template that tells me what I need to do or when it's okay to stop my efforts.

"Sometimes I think, 'I have enough evidence on this case. I could be spending some time on another one,' but until I get to the hearing, I don't know with absolute certainty." Often, part of his mind continues to churn on the thought "Have I done enough?"

"I can really feel how that anxiety

divides my consciousness and creates a lot of tension," he says.

The right prescription

To reverse these two patterns – the



"I enjoy the day so much more when my mind is calm," says Rollie, "and I know my calmness benefits those around me too."

"inward groaning" and the anxiety – Rollie decided that he wanted to memorize a new meditation passage. All of the passages in *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* were selected by Easwaran for their effectiveness in changing negative thought habits to positive, but Rollie wanted one that focused specifically on the qualities he sought to strengthen. Picking up his copy of the book, Rollie soon found an ideal choice (see box on next page).

"When I found the passage, I thought, 'Wow! That's been there all the time and I never noticed it,'" says Rollie. The line *I must come to the end of each day with a feeling that I have used its gifts gratefully and faced its trials bravely* spoke to his interactions with distressed clients. And the line *I must do my allotted task with unflinching faithfulness* would help train his mind to focus on the things he *could*

control – such as doing unpleasant or difficult jobs promptly – rather than wasting energy in anxiety. "I memorized the passage and started meditating on it every day."

And in addition to the specific message of the prayer and the absorption of it by slow, silent repetition, the very act of sitting down to meditate every morning, no matter what, was already working on both of those negative tendencies. Fulfilling that daily commitment was strengthening his ability to face situations squarely and calmly.

Staying focused

Rollie started to pay more attention to maintaining the focus he had built in meditation, so he could keep making progress during the day. "I noticed that if I can be completely absorbed in what my clients are saying, it's easier to find the right time to move things along. When I'm not entertaining those negative thoughts but just quietly waiting for the right moment –

maybe repeating my mantram a few times – then when I do break in, it seems to come across more respectfully. My clients are much more likely to listen to and accept my explanation for why we now need to cover some important points about their case."

And even in particularly challenging cases, staying focused has helped. "Not long ago a gentleman came in who was suffering from paranoid delusions, which he went on about in a very loud voice. I listened to a lot of it, but after I had tried to redirect the conversation a few times, he got angry at me and started shouting. 'You people never listen!'"

Rollie's immediate internal reaction was "Gee, I thought I was bending over backwards!" But because he'd been working on giving more attention to his clients, it was more natural to return his focus to this man's welfare, rather than

taking the outburst personally. Furthermore, every day Rollie had been meditating on the words *I must be gentle in the face of ingratitude*. “So it was much easier for me to realize, ‘Well, he’s obviously seeing things from an entirely different perspective.’

“I apologized to him and explained that I do understand that he’s in pain and care about his difficulties, but that we need to focus on what’s going to win the case for him. That seemed to calm him down, and I think he appreciated it.

“In general, I think my clients have a better experience now,” says Rollie, “and I do too. I find my work more interesting and enjoy it more.” With a slower mind, he’s more apt to notice details about his clients – and even be inspired by them. “Today, for example, I received a basket of fruit from one of my clients. He has a learning disability, bad knees and other physical problems, and is struggling to raise his kids. But I’ve been impressed by what a grateful person he is,” says Rollie. “Seeing how strong that quality is in him was a good reminder to keep developing it in myself.”

Subtle shift, different outcome

The improvements to Rollie’s concentration also began to affect his interactions with his nearest and dearest.

“After a long day, one of my daughters came to me with a problem when I got home. Somebody at school had sent her an anonymous e-mail that was very upsetting to her.”

Rollie says, “The fact that someone was tormenting my daughter in this way wasn’t pleasing to me, but giving

my full attention to what she was saying helped me not react angrily.”

That clarity of mind also helped him break through an old dynamic. “This daughter had a tendency to get upset when she thought I wasn’t listen-

she wanted to tell him, she seemed much calmer. At the end of their conversation, Rollie was pleasantly surprised to see an apparently negative experience turn into an opportunity for growth – not only for him but for

his daughter as well. “We talked about how everybody out there is making mistakes, and that this person is just fumbling along like the rest of us. Then my daughter mentioned that this painful experience was giving her a better perspective on being critical of other people. Sometimes we start with gentle teasing and all of a sudden it has a sting to it. ‘I’m going to make a special effort to avoid that,’ she said.

“When we were done,” says Rollie, “it seemed like a burden had been lifted off her shoulders.

“Two days later she had to give a presentation, and she’s usually shy. She really seemed to enjoy it, though, and got a lot of positive feedback. I think rising above that other situation had given her a helpful boost. That was very gratifying to see.

“I’m still on a major learning curve,” says Rollie, “but every year the practice sinks in deeper and deeper”

– slowly becoming, as the passage says, *a familiar way of life*.

“I like how Easwaran says that it’s not about big dramatic things, but the little efforts.” And even though the changes are subtle, says Rollie, “Dealing a blow to a negative tendency brings a sense of exhilaration. I see that when I devote sustained effort and concentration to my practice, it does have a beneficial effect on me and on the people around me.” ☞

Evening Prayer for the Sabbath

Jewish Liturgy

In this moment of silent communion with Thee,
O Lord, a still small voice speaks in the depth of
my spirit.

It speaks to me of the things I must do to attain
holy kinship with Thee and to grow in the
likeness of Thee.

I must do my allotted task with unflagging
faithfulness even though the eye of no
taskmaster is on me.

I must be gentle in the face of ingratitude or when
slander distorts my noblest motives.

I must come to the end of each day with a feeling
that I have used its gifts gratefully and faced its
trials bravely.

O Lord, help me to be ever more like Thee, holy
for Thou art holy, loving for Thou art love.

Speak to me, then, Lord, as I seek Thee again and
again in the stillness of meditation, until Thy
bidding shall at last become for me a hallowed
discipline, a familiar way of life.

ing to her – when I thought I was,” he says. But Rollie realized that he might have been cutting the listening process a little short by proposing solutions to problems.

“This time, though, I didn’t ask too many questions or try to get to a fix quickly. There’s a time and place for analytical ability, but I could see that she needed reassurance more than advice.”

As Rollie’s daughter finished what

Finding Peace on the Road

I AM A reformed speeder,” says Jim P. “Several years ago, I drove down a mountain and into a speed trap. I had let my mind wander,” he remembers. “My thoughts sped up and my car followed, exceeding the limit by a dangerous amount. The good news is that when the highway patrolman pulled me over, I recognized that he was doing me a favor and accepted the ticket as if he were saving my life.

“From that day on, I made my best effort to obey the speed limit – which of course is a more fuel-efficient way of driving anyway. Fine. That was good.”

As Jim paid more attention to driving safely, however, he became more aware of the less safe habits of other motorists. Yet-to-be-reformed drivers zoomed past him on the interstate, others wove in and out of his lane. And each incident provoked an irritated monologue in his head.

But he didn’t want to be irritated. It was pointless, since he couldn’t control the behavior of other drivers. It was counterproductive, because an agitated mind made concentrating on the road more difficult. And finally, as had become increasingly vivid to him through his years of meditation, it was unpleasant. In other words, he was ready for a deeper challenge. He had already changed his behavior. Now he wanted to change his thoughts.

“What could I do? Easwaran advises us to give our full attention to the road when driving. So I would try to do that: recognize when my mind

had gotten agitated and refocus it. But then another driver would speed by me and the agitation would come again. They kept passing me, and I kept passing judgment.

“That’s when the line from ‘The Whole World Is Your Own’ came to my rescue.”

The Whole World Is Your Own Sri Sarada Devi

I tell you one thing –
If you want peace of mind,
do not find fault with others.

Rather learn to see your own faults.
Learn to make the whole world your own.

No one is a stranger, my child;
this whole world is your own.

One day when this usual pattern was about to play out, Jim remembered a line from one of his meditation passages: “If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others” (see box).

“As a result of having used that line in meditation for so many years, driving it below the surface level of consciousness, it came up almost as a warning signal. It reminded me of the bigger picture of where I’m really trying to go – my higher purpose – and how to get there.” When these words resurfaced, they brought with them stronger motivation and willpower than Jim had had access to before.

“Every time another driver did something dangerous, I would remind myself that what I aspire to is greater peace of mind, and that as soon as I start judging other people, I lose whatever peace I’ve gained.”

And the meaning of the rest of the passage seemed to follow that line naturally. “I’d remember that those

other drivers are not ‘strangers,’ but other souls like me. They’re not doing anything I haven’t done, and since I don’t know what’s going on with them, I’m not in a position to judge.” Instead, he felt inspired to improve the situation by continuing to work on making changes in himself – without getting discouraged about his own drawbacks either.

“That passage became the fulcrum on which I could turn my mind back to the road and keep it there longer,” says Jim.

“Easwaran’s description of ‘the peace that passes all understanding’ is so beautiful – something I aspire to,” says Jim. “As I continue to work on finding my peace and contentment within, as opposed to being dependent on external circumstances or stimuli, keeping my mind focused on what I’m doing is very useful in that struggle. When I can manage to remain nonjudgmental of others’

behavior and can perform an activity with one-pointed concentration, that can be very satisfying and helps to keep me in a positive and fulfilling place.” ☺

Meditation on an inspirational passage is the cornerstone of Easwaran’s eight point program of passage meditation. For a list and short description of the other seven points, please see page 2. Further resources, information, instruction, and inspiration – including the content of Easwaran’s classic book *Meditation* – are freely available at www.easwaran.org

Rekindle the Fire: A Year of Renewal

“What can I do when my enthusiasm for meditation runs low?”

“I’m in the doldrums – I’ve missed meditation several times this month and just can’t get myself back on the cushion.”

“Help! I’ve lost the spark. What can I do?”

It’s natural – and expected – to hit a dry spell in meditation. In fact, it’s often a sign that you are ready to explore new challenges by deepening your practice.

In response to many requests we’ve received from experienced meditators who could use a boost, we’re launching a “Year of Renewal” in our retreat programs. Newcomers will also find this a great time for starting their practice on solid footing.

At every retreat, we see the amazing changes that take place when people immerse themselves in their practice for a day, a weekend, or a week, absorbing the warm enthusiasm and

determination of other meditators. And this year, we are adding a strategy that has worked for many people: developing a plan for maintaining your enthusiasm all year long. You will learn little practices for rejuvenating meditation that can be woven into even a busy schedule.

And when you get the inspiration and instruction you need, you see that your practice is not just helping you get by – it’s helping you thrive.

By renewing ourselves, we can become a force for renewal in the world. It’s a thrilling thought.

*Scenes from a recent Young Adult retreat at our retreat house in rural Northern California.
Please call us if you’d like to know which type of retreat would best fit your needs.*



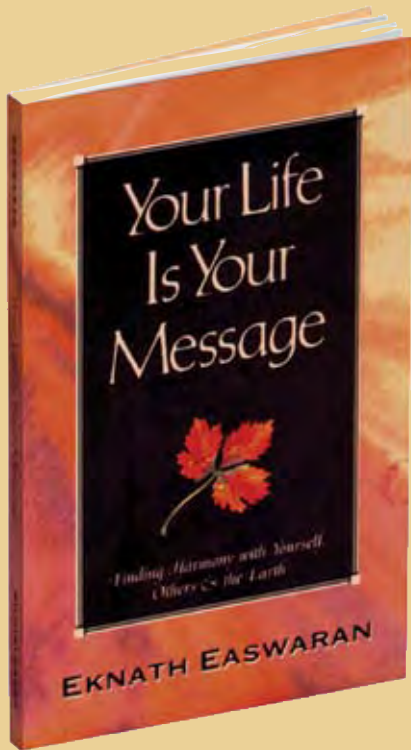
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Please call us at 800 475 2369
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See back page for the 2008 retreat calendar.

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NEW March 8–14: Weeklong In-Depth
March 28–30: Weekend In-Depth

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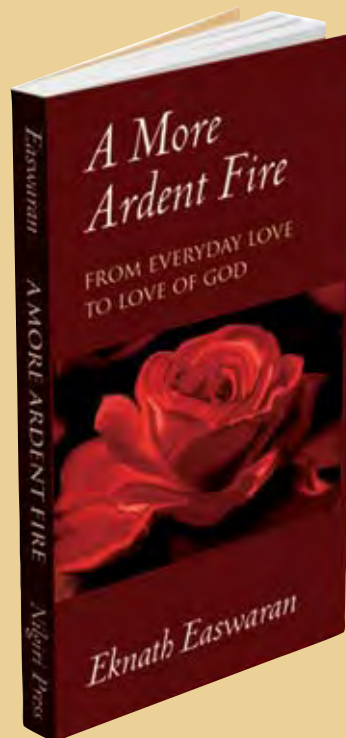
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Once, while Mahatma Gandhi’s train was pulling slowly out of the station, a European reporter ran up to his compartment window.

“Do you have a message I can take back to my people?” he asked.

It was Gandhi’s day of silence, a vital respite from his demanding speaking schedule, so he didn’t reply. Instead, he scrawled a few words on a scrap of paper and passed it to the reporter: “My life is my message.”

“Through my personal experience, I have become convinced that there is no instrument of change more powerful than the well-lived life,” writes Easwaran. “Each of us has the capacity to become a healing and protecting force in the family, with friends, at work, in the community, in the environment.” And he adds, “If little people like you and me work together, we can do a great deal to transform the world.”

Humorous and profound, this little book of short pieces offers practical steps for becoming more loving, more focused, more capable of living out our highest ideals.

Translating lofty ideals into practical wisdom, Easwaran guides us through the nitty-gritty challenges of learning to love more deeply.

Book Excerpt: “One of the worst misconceptions about the spiritual life is that we have to drop out of the world to pursue it – turn our back upon our family, go away from society, get into a cave, and sit there for twelve years until illumination dawns. In my eyes, the spiritual life is one of selfless action and rich relationships with everyone around, extending not merely to a few among family and friends, but wider and wider until our love embraces the whole of life.

“In India, where religion has been regarded for thousands of years as an art, a skill, and even a science, there is a little manual on the Way of Love that would be recognized by mystics everywhere because it is so free from dogma. It is embedded in the Bhagavad Gita, India’s best-loved scripture. Like parts of the *Imitation of Christ*, it is composed as a dialogue between the human and the divine – between Arjuna, a warrior prince who represents you and me, and Sri Krishna, an incarnation of the Lord. . . . I have laid out this book as a commentary on each verse, drawing on my own experience to illustrate the applications to everyday life.

“The implication of this teaching is simple but very far reaching. Love is a skill that every one of us can learn – not merely for personal enrichment, but so that deepening and strengthening our relationships becomes a sure, swift path toward making God a reality in our everyday lives.”

BLUE MOUNTAIN



A JOURNAL FOR
SPIRITUAL LIVING
BASED ON
EKNATH EASWARAN'S
EIGHT POINT PROGRAM

Many of the books mentioned in this journal are available at your local bookstore. Please look for them.

Listed on this page are the dates and locations of the meditation retreats we are offering in the coming months at various locations around the country.



Retreats in Tomales, California, and across the U.S. in 2008

Spend a day, a weekend, or a week learning how the practice of meditation can help you to increase your concentration and meet life's challenges more effectively.

We offer programs at our retreat house on California's beautiful North Coast and at various locations around the country.

Weekend retreats run from Friday dinner through Sunday lunch.

Retreats in Tomales, California

February 29–March 4: Half-Week for seniors and those facing life-threatening illness

NEW *March 8–14: Weeklong In-Depth*

March 28–30: Weekend In-Depth

April 12: One-Day Introductory & Refresher

April 25–27: Weekend In-Depth

May 17–23: Weeklong In-Depth

June 27–29: Weekend Introductory & Refresher

July 5–11: Weeklong In-Depth

July 25–27: Weekend In-Depth

August 2–8: Weeklong In-Depth

August 16: One-Day Introductory & Refresher

September 5–9: Half-Week for seniors and those facing life-threatening illness

September 20–26: Weeklong In-Depth

NEW *October 10–12: Weekend In-Depth*

November 7–9: Young Adult Weekend, Introductory & In-Depth

November 14–16: Weekend Introductory & Refresher

Retreats across the U.S.

NEW *March 1: Dallas One-Day*

April 26: Florida One-Day

May 2–4: Boston Weekend

May 3: Boston One-Day

NEW *May 16–18: Virginia Weekend (commuter only)*

NEW *May 17: Virginia One-Day*

May 30–June 1: Kansas/Missouri Weekend

June 7: Los Angeles One-Day

June 20–22: New York Weekend

June 21: New York One-Day

August 22–24: Denver Weekend

August 23: Denver One-Day

September 12–14: Chicago Weekend

September 13: Chicago One-Day

NEW *September 27: San Diego One-Day*

November 22: Sacramento One-Day

Retreats across the U.S., Young Adult retreats, and Senior Half-Week retreats offer both introductory and in-depth workshops.