Eknath Easwaran

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**Eknath Easwaran** (December 17, 1910 – October 26, 1999)[1] is known as a spiritual teacher and the author of books on meditation and how to lead a fulfilling life, as well as a translator and interpreter of Indian literature.

In 1961 Easwaran founded the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation and Nilgiri Press, based in northern California. Nilgiri Press publishes over two dozen books he authored.

Easwaran was influenced by Gandhi, whom Easwaran met when he was a young man. Easwaran developed a method of meditation — silent repetition in the mind of memorized inspirational passages from the world's great religions[2] — which later came to be known as Passage Meditation.

### Biography

Easwaran was born in 1910 in a village in Kerala, British India.[3] Eknath is his surname.

Easwaran's given name.[4] Brought up by his mother, and by his maternal grandmother whom he honored as his spiritual teacher, he was schooled in his native village until the age of sixteen, when he went to attend a Catholic college fifty miles away. Here he acquired a deep appreciation of the Christian tradition. He graduated at the University of Nagpur in English and law. He served as Professor of English literature at the University of Nagpur.

In 1959, he came to the United States as a Fulbright Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley.[4][5]

From 1960 he gave classes on meditation in the San Francisco Bay Area. He met his wife Christine at one of these talks. Together with his wife, he founded the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation in 1961. After a four-year stay in India, he returned to the Bay Area in 1965.

In 1970 he founded Ramagiri Ashram as a community of dedicated followers in Marin County.[6]

He set up a publishing activity, Nilgiri Press, which printed his first book *Gandhi The Man*, telling the story of Gandhi as a spiritual as well as a political leader. His first major work was his 3-volume commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, the *Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living*, the first volume of which was printed in 1975 and the last in 1984. His book *Meditation* on the program of meditation and allied disciplines that he developed first appeared in 1978.

### Written works

Easwaran's writings may be grouped into several major categories—primarily books, but also articles in newspapers and other periodicals. Most of his books have been reviewed by spiritually oriented publications or websites, or by nationally known media such as *The New Yorker,*[7] or the *New York Post.[8]*

### Translations

His translations of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Dhammapada* have been critically acclaimed. Religion scholar Huston Smith is cited by the publisher as writing: "No one in modern times is more qualified - no, make that "as qualified" - to translate the epochal Classics of Indian Spirituality than Eknath Easwaran. And the reason is clear. It is impossible to get to the heart of those classics unless you live them, and he did live them. My admiration of the man and his works is boundless."[9] In *Buddhism: A Concise Introduction*[10] Smith and his coauthor Philip Novak wrote that "Our favorite translation is Eknath Easwaran's *The Dhammapada.* His Indian heritage, literary gifts, and spiritual sensibilities...
commentaries

**Essence of the Upanishads** (see article), originally entitled *Dialogue with death: The spiritual psychology of the Katha Upanishad*, and explains how the Katha Upanishad embraces the key ideas of Indian spirituality within the context of a powerful mythic quest — the story of a young hero who ventures into the land of death in search of immortality. "*Essence of the Upanishads* is a westerner's guide to this vitally important Indian text and its modern relevance to the Indian mindset and spirituality."[11]

**Books on meditation**

*Main articles: Passage Meditation and Mantram Handbook*

His book *Passage Meditation* (original title Meditation) describes the Eight Point Program that Easwaran developed, while his book *Conquest of Mind* goes further into the practice of these disciplines in daily life. *Timeless Wisdom* is a companion book to *Passage Meditation* and contains passages for meditation drawn from across the world's spiritual traditions. His book *Mantram Handbook: a practical guide to choosing your mantram and calming your mind* addresses The Mantram, the second point in the program.

His book *Strength in the Storm* is an introduction to The Mantram, containing many stories and practical examples to help the reader learn how to harness the inner resources for dealing with challenges in daily life. His book *Take Your Time* explores "Slowing Down" and "One-Pointed Attention" in daily lives. *Renewal* is a pocket book of short readings on themes such as loving relationships, raising children, living simply, and aging wisely; *Patience*, the second in the pocket series, shows how to cultivate Patience - "the ornament of the brave" - at any age. Other (older) books describe various aspects of leading a spiritual life: *Climbing the Blue Mountain*, *Compassionate Universe*, and *Undiscovered Country*.

**Daily readers and reference**

*God Makes the Rivers to Flow* is an anthology of writings from the sacred literature of the world, selected by Easwaran as useful for meditation. A larger (and earlier) version of *Timeless Wisdom*, it contains dozens of passages from diverse traditions, and identifies passages for particular stages in life, such as caregiving, families with small children, death and dying, grief and loss, and for building positive qualities such as patience, courage, devotion to God, and putting others first. *Words to Live By* is a set of daily readings with Easwaran's commentary on applying the reading to daily life.

**The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living**

The 3 volumes of *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living* are conceived as handbooks for applying the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita to lives today. *End of Sorrow* concentrates on the individual — how one can discover one's innermost nature, and transform one's life through self-realization, selfless service, and meditation. *Like a Thousand Suns* addresses relationships — how one can heal divisions in society, within one's relationships, and within oneself, and realize the unity governing all creation. *To Love is To Know Me* gives a global view, describing what individual readers can do to make a difference in the world today, and ends with a description of bhakti yoga, the path of devotion.

**Spiritual biographies**

*Main articles: Gandhi the Man and Nonviolent Soldier of Islam*

*Gandhi the Man* traces how Mohandas Gandhi transformed himself into one of the world's great spiritual leaders.

*Nonviolent Soldier of Islam* is the life story of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, a Pathan (or Pushtun) of Afghanistan and a devout Muslim, who raised the first nonviolent army in history to free his people from British imperial rule. This book was favorably discussed in *The New Yorker*. The book also inspired filmmaker and writer T.C. McLuhan, daughter of Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, to make the film *The Frontier Gandhi: Badshah Khan, a Torch for Peace*, which won the 2009 Black Pearl Award for Best Documentary Film.

**Commentaries on Christian literature**

*Love Never Fails* is a commentary on the writings of St Francis, St Paul, St Augustine, and Mother Teresa, *Original Goodness* is a commentary on the Beatitudes, and *Seeing with the Eyes of Love* is a commentary on *The Imitation of Christ*.

**Newspapers and other periodicals**

In the 1980s and 1990s, Easwaran published a variety of commentaries on public events in prominent periodicals, especially the *Christian Science Monitor,* and also in the *New York Times,* elsewhere in the US and internationally. He also wrote numerous commentaries that appeared in the *Little Lamp* (1961–1995), and in *Blue Mountain* (1990–present), quarterly journals published by the meditation center that he founded.

**Eight-point program**

Easwaran's program for spiritual growth consists of eight points was introduced with his 1976 book *Meditation*. Each point had a dedicated chapter: [36]

1. **Meditation**: Silent repetition upon memorized inspirational passages from one of the world's great religions. Practiced for one-half hour each morning.
2. **The Mantram**: silent repetition of a *mantram*, holy name or hallowed phrase from one of the world's great religions.
3. **Slowing Down**: set priorities to reduce stress and hurry
4. **One-Pointed Attention**: give full concentration to whatever matter is currently at hand
5. **Training the Senses**: enjoy simple pleasures in order to avoid craving for unhealthy excess
6. **Putting Others First**: denounce selfishness and cultivating *altruism*
7. **Spiritual Companionship**: practice meditation in the company of others
8. **Reading the Mystics**: draw inspiration from the writings of the scriptures of all religions.

**Other Influence**

A variety of influences of Easwaran's life and work have been documented. Easwaran's students, inspired in part by his teachings about compassion and stewardship for the environment, published a well-known *vegetarian* cookbook entitled *Laurel's Kitchen* (1976), later republished in revised form as *The New Laurel's Kitchen* (1998). The book contained extensive nutritional information from a scientific point of view; and odd areas

produce a sublime rendering of the words of the Buddha. Verse after verse shimmers with quiet, confident authority. A bonus is the sparkling 70-page introduction to the Buddha's life and teachings.*
Outside of the US, Easwaran's life and teachings were profiled, along with those of a variety of other spiritual teachers, in a book published in India entitled *Meditation Masters and their Insights*. [38]

Easwaran's words have been included in collections of wisdom teachings, such as one recently published by Chang (2006). [39] Quotations from Easwaran's translations have been used many times by both scholarly and popular writers. [40][41][42] Easwaran's other writings have also been quoted by various types of authors, including writers of novels and short stories, [43] popular spirituality, [44] and articles on management theory. [45] Psychiatrist Aaron Beck and his colleagues quoted from Easwaran's commentary on the *Katha Upanishad*. [46]

Easwaran has been listed in reference works on spiritual and religious leaders. [47][48][49]
With My Love and Blessings: The Teaching Years, 1966–1999, in Photographs & His Own Words

Contributions to works by others include:


References

3. However, after he came to the United States, “Easwaran” generally functioned as his last name (analogous to a surname) for authorship credits and other public activities.
7. A. B. Bill McKibben (1984, Sep. 24). "Notes and Comment" (in "The Talk of the Town"); discusses Easwaran's A Man to Match His Mountains, a biography of Abdul Ghaffar Khan. The New Yorker, pp. 39-40. "A straightforwardly yet devoted biography... By his example, [Khan] asks what we ourselves, as individuals made from the same stuff as he, are doing to shape history." (p. 39-40).
13. Spirituality and Practice, review of Take Your Time
14. A. B. Easwaran is one of the most powerful Hindu teachers lecturing and writing in America... this book is meant to be a companion for the difficult but joyous interior work of spiritual transformation that is at the heart of his teachings," wrote Publishers Weekly in a review of the original edition: Henry Carrigan (1996). "Your life is your message: Finding harmony with yourself, others, and the earth." Publishers Weekly, v243 n29, p69. (republished in 2009 as Renewal)
20. Spirituality and Practice, review of To Love is To Know Me http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/books.php?id=1124
35. Several articles that Easwaran published in the Little Lamp (ISSN 0480-1297, LCCN: 83641607 sn 80000451) appeared later in revised form in his books; most copies of Blue Mountain (LCCN: af92093327) that appeared after 2000 can be downloaded from the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation website. Although primarily quarterly, each of these journals appeared at times on other schedules.
36. The Eight Point Program of Passage Meditation - A Complete Approach to Spiritual Growth (easwaran.org)
37. Laurel Robertson, Carol Flinders, & Brian Ruppenthal (1986). The new Laurel's kitchen. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press. ISBN 0898151678. The 1986 edition is dedicated to "our teacher, Eknath Easwaran" (p. 13), and the back cover states "over a million copies sold" (see link []). In an introduction to the 1986 edition, Flinders wrote of "the collection of friends who helped produce Laurel's Kitchen ten years ago," that "we share a commitment to meditation" (p. 20).
42. A popular example is: Gayle Clayton (2004). Transformative Meditation: Personal & Group Practice to Access Realms of Consciousness Llewellyn
50. ^ Lynn Garrett (1998, Jan. 12). *Gandhi in China*. *Publishers Weekly*, v245 n2, p30. *"Nilgiri Press... was surprised to receive an e-mail in September from the Sichuan Copyright Agency in the People's Republic of China, expressing interest in publishing a Chinese edition of its Gandhi the Man (especially since relations between China and India have not always been the best).... the book will be released in China on January 30"* (p. 30).

### External links

- Blue Mountain Center of Meditation and Nilgiri Press
- Easwaran biography

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