

For Free and for Inspiration

This booklet was compiled by AA members who use this method of meditation and find it a perfect fit with AA principles and practices.

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“Although my method of meditation is slightly different from what is described in this pamphlet, I endorse this effort because it is consistent with Twelve Step philosophy. Indeed, I helped form a steering committee that suggested we “keep it simple” and publish at cost so that no one makes a profit. We are therefore pleased to present this pamphlet as a public service. The Blue Mountain Center of Meditation is one of those treasure troves of spiritual information. Their many books will likely resonate with followers of all mainstream spiritual traditions.”

– *Rich M., for the Steering Committee*

For more information about Eknath Easwaran's method of Passage Meditation visit: www.easwaran.org/learn

Passage Meditation & the Eleventh Step

The Method of Meditation

Developed by

E K N A T H E A S W A R A N

Presented to the Recovery Community

by AA Meditators

“Prayer and meditation are our principal means of conscious contact with God.”

–*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, p. 96

“. . . we sometimes select and memorize a few set prayers which emphasize the principles we have been discussing. There are many helpful books also.”

–*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 87

“I tried various meditation practices, but nothing really seemed to work until one day I found one that was perfect. A sober friend gave me the book *Meditation* by Eknath Easwaran, which gives a simple, detailed explanation of a meditation practice similar to the one that Bill mentions in the Twelve and Twelve. Bill suggests taking a prayer from any of the great men and women of the world’s religions who have had spiritual experiences and suggests that we say the words slowly in the mind. Both books illustrate this with the Saint Francis Prayer.

“Meditating in this way has given me an emotional sobriety and inner peace that I never thought was possible. Meditation helps me slow down my mind so that my ‘committee’ doesn’t have the power it once did, leaving me calmer and less ruffled. It helps me to be a more loving, compassionate, peaceful, and joyful person.” – *Abby V.*

“Easwaran’s method of meditation is so practical. Rather than trying to make your mind a blank (impossible!), it gives your mind something to hold on to: a spiritual passage of your own choosing to hold on to as you go down into your subconscious. Like AA, Easwaran’s approach is nondenominational; you can choose your own higher power, and it works together with (or without) any spiritual tradition you might already be part of. It even works for atheists, because the basic practice is training the mind.

“Furthermore, the way it dovetails with the Big Book and the Twelve and Twelve is almost too synchronous for words. Through this practice I have found greater reserves of energy and patience. I no longer wonder what life is all about. I know that I’m here for a purpose.” – *Max G.*

Our Stories

“After many years of sobriety and meditation I am pleased to find that my meditation practice quietly supports my AA program. I often meditate on AA prayers and inspirational passages that emphasize key AA principles, such as acceptance, surrender, and willingness. This is enormously helpful because “we become what we meditate on,” according to Eknath Easwaran.

“Daily meditation has improved my concentration and helped me focus my attention so that I can quiet the clamor of the mind and turn my thoughts away from resentment and negativity. I end my morning meditation by praying for knowledge of God’s will for me and the power to carry it out. The eleventh step is rich and wonderful and meditation unleashes its power.” – *Jennifer J.*

“I started meditating when I was still a drunk and it helped me make the small bit of progress that I needed to get sober. Over the years I have found that there are many benefits to be gained from spiritual practice and especially from meditation. The one of most concern to AA members is that it is a very powerful tool for breaking the hold of self-will. To free ourselves of compulsive desires and tame self-will, we must learn to direct our attention away from ourselves and to focus our attention on serving others. We do this through meditation.

“Meditation also enables us to find a power greater than ourselves and to learn the interior quiet that will enable us to perceive, however dimly, the presence of God in our lives, so that we may hear his will for us.” – *Hill G.*

Introduction

We are delighted to present this meditation pamphlet to members of Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step communities. We are longtime AA members who have found this method of meditation especially compatible with the wisdom and instructions contained in the AA literature. Because we have derived immense benefit from it, we would like to share it with you. The method of meditation we refer to is described in a book entitled *Meditation*, written by Eknath Easwaran in 1978. From the time of its publication, AA members from around the world have been drawn to it.

We have been fortunate to work with the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation and the editors of *Meditation* to present a condensed version of the meditation instructions. These have been combined with pertinent passages from the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.

We feel we have made significant progress on the 11th step by trying to follow these instructions, and we would like to make this opportunity available to others. May we support one another as we trudge the road of happy destiny!

– *Jennifer J. & Rich M.*

*With special thanks to Hill G., Max G., Tracey G.,
Chuck I., Barney M., Brooks M., Carl M., Bob R.,
Bob P., & Abby V.*

*“We will want the good that is in us all,
even the worst of us, to flower and to grow. . . .
How, then, shall we meditate? . . .
Well, we might start like this. First let’s
look at a really good prayer. . . .”**

THE PRAYER OF SAINT 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.*

* From *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, pages 98–99. The version of the Saint Francis Prayer on this page is the one Eknath Easwaran used; the AA version is on page 99 of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.

More Passages for Meditation

1. The Path

I know the path: it is strait and narrow.

It is like the edge of a sword.

I rejoice to walk on it.

I weep when I slip.

God’s word is:

“He who strives never perishes.”

I have implicit faith in that promise.

Though, therefore, from my weakness

I fail a thousand times,

I shall not lose faith.

– MAHATMA GANDHI

2. Let Nothing Upset You

Let nothing upset you;

Let nothing frighten you.

Everything is changing;

God alone is changeless.

Patience attains the goal.

Who has God lacks nothing;

God alone fills every need.

– TERESA OF AVILA

By drawing on meditation, we can stay alert, active, and creative throughout the natural span of our lives. It is then that we come into our legitimate human legacy: long, healthy, hopeful, fulfilling lives.

Learning to control your mind is difficult – the most difficult thing in the world. But I want to remind you always that what you are seeking is glorious beyond compare, something far beyond my capacity, or anybody's, to render into thoughts and words. In my heart I have no greater desire than that you should reach this goal. Accept my wish for your great success!

Meditation is something which can always be further developed. It has no boundaries, either of width or height. Aided by such instruction and example as we can find, it is essentially an individual adventure, something which each one of us works out in his own way. But its object is always the same: to improve our conscious contact with God, with His grace, wisdom and love.

–Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 101

How to Meditate

By Eknath Easwaran

I am going to suppose that your purpose in picking up this book is to learn to meditate; so I will begin straight away with some instructions.

I recommend beginning with the Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi. If you already know another passage, such as the Twenty-third Psalm, it will do nicely until you have learned this prayer. But over many years of teaching meditation, I have found that Saint Francis's words have an almost universal appeal. Through them pulses the spiritual wisdom this gentle friar drew upon when he undertook the most awesome task a human being is capable of – the total transformation of character, conduct, and consciousness.

The Saint Francis Prayer is on the opposite page. To use it in meditation, you will want to commit it to memory.

Having memorized the Prayer, be seated and softly close your eyes – without getting tense about it. Since the body should be relaxed, not strained, there is no need to be effortful. The best teacher for eye-closing I have seen is a baby . . . tired lids gently sliding down on tired eyes.

Now you are ready to go through the prayer word by word, and very, very slowly. Why slowly? Think of a car tearing along at ninety miles per hour. The driver may feel exuberant, powerful,

but a number of things can suddenly cause him to lose control. When he is moving at thirty miles per hour, his car handles easily; even if somebody else makes a dangerous maneuver, he can probably turn and avoid a collision. So too with the mind. When its desperate whirrings slow down, intentionality and good judgment appear, then love, and finally what the Bible calls “the peace that passeth understanding.”

Let the words, therefore, proceed slowly. You can cluster the small helper words with a word of substance, like this:

Lord, . . . make . . . me . . . an instrument . . . of thy . . . peace.

The space between words is a matter for each person to work out individually. They should be comfortably spaced with a little elbowroom between. If the words come too close together, you will not be slowing down the mind.

With some experimentation, you will find your own best pace. I remember that when I learned to drive many years ago, my instructor kept trying patiently to teach me to use the clutch. I was not a terribly apt pupil. After a number of chugging stops and dying engines, I asked him how I was ever going to master those pedals. He said, “You get a feeling for it.” That is the way with the words too: you will know intuitively when not enough space lies between them and when there is too much.

Concentrate on one word at a time, and let the words slip one after another into your consciousness like pearls falling into a clear pond. Let them all drop inwards one at a time.

Of course, we learn this skill gradually. For some time we drop a word and it floats on the surface, bumped around by distract-

Meditation also brings the understanding and the will to change harmful ways of living. Lifestyle factors like smoking and overeating contribute to many of the health problems we face today. As if that’s not enough, we have some invisible weaponry too: anger, resentment, hostility, impatience, jealousy, competitiveness, worry. Even vague problems like a lack of purpose in life can stage incessant attacks, not only on the heart but on other systems of the body as well.

Perhaps one of the greatest rewards of meditation and prayer is the sense of belonging that comes to us. We no longer live in a completely hostile world. We are no longer lost and frightened and purposeless. The moment we catch even a glimpse of God’s will, the moment we begin to see truth, justice and love as the real and eternal things in life, we are no longer deeply disturbed by all the seeming evidence to the contrary that surrounds us in purely human affairs. We know that God lovingly watches over us. We know that when we turn to Him, all will be well with us, here and hereafter.

– Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p.105

For most of us, however, the most immediate benefit that meditation brings to health is a flood of vitality. Even in the second half of life, morning meditation recharges your batteries so you have a full reservoir of energy to draw on for whatever challenges the day might bring.

cally, every moment opens up choices. Each morning you wake up knowing that you can give a good account of yourself and make a contribution to the welfare of people around you. You do not have to ask whether the day is going to be pleasant or whether you will get your way. You expect difficulties, yet you know you have the capacity to overcome them, too.

And let's always remember that meditation is in reality intensely practical. One of its first fruits is emotional balance. With it we can broaden and deepen the channel between ourselves and God as we understand Him.

– *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, pp. 101–102

Meditation brings not only what psychologists call a “hardy personality,” but also a sense of marvelous wellness in body, mind, and spirit. You feel that everything is essentially right with you and there is a sense of friendliness about you. Despite its problems, you feel the world is not a hostile place. Nothing can guarantee that the body will be free from problems; it is physical and has to obey physical laws. But the vitality, resilience, and endurance that meditation brings can sustain you through even serious physical challenges.

In addition, meditation relieves stress, to which so many physical and emotional problems are due. Stress is epidemic today; it is hard to imagine escaping it without withdrawing entirely. But if we cannot escape stress, we can surely learn to manage it.

tions, irrelevant imagery, fantasies, worries, regrets, and negative emotions. At least we see just how far we are from being able to give the mind a simple order that it will carry out. Nothing really worth having comes quickly and easily; if it did, I doubt that we would ever grow.

As you attend to each word dropping singly, significantly, into your consciousness, you will realize that there is no discrepancy between sound and meaning. When you concentrate on the sound of each word, you will also be concentrating on the meaning of the passage. Sound and sense are one.

. . . when we turn away from meditation and prayer, we likewise deprive our minds, our emotions, and our intuitions of vitally needed support. As the body can fail its purpose for lack of nourishment, so can the soul. We all need the light of God's reality, the nourishment of His strength, and the atmosphere of His grace. To an amazing extent the facts of A.A. life confirm this ageless truth.

– *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, pp. 97–98

Distractions

As you go through the passage, do not follow any association of ideas. Just keep to the words. Despite your best efforts, you will find this extremely difficult. You will begin to realize what an accomplished trickster the mind is, to what lengths it will go to evade your sovereignty.

Let us say you reach the end of the first line: “. . . an instrument . . . of thy . . . peace.” So far your mind has been fully on the passage and has not wandered at all. Excellent! But at the word “peace” the mind asks, “Who is the Prince of Peace?”

Well, that is a very spiritual question, and you say, “Jesus Christ.”

“Do you know where the Prince of Peace was born?” the mind returns quickly.

“Yes, Bethlehem.”

“Have you heard about Bethlehem Steel?”

And you’re off. “Oh, yes. In fact, my father has a few shares in it.”

“Oh, yeah,” says the mind. “How’re they doing?”

Now you are supposed to be meditating on the words of Saint Francis, but you continue with this absurd dialogue. This is the sort of thing you really have to be on the lookout for. Don’t let your mind wander from the words of the inspirational passage. If you want to ruminate on the stock exchange, get a copy of the *Wall Street Journal* and study it later. Under no circumstances should you try to answer questions or recall things during meditation. That is exactly what the mind wants; it tries to escape and become enmeshed in something – anything – else. The only strategy is to keep your concentration on the passage as much and as long as you can. It will be very difficult at times.

Suppose that the mind does get completely away from you. What should you do? In football, as you know, certain penalties are part of the game, and in meditation too a penalty should be applied when the mind becomes unruly. Be fair, and state the rules

Summary: Instructions in Meditation

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

be very beneficial. But it becomes an obstacle if you dwell on it, get excited about it, run to report it to everybody. When you go on concentrating on the passage even during waves of emotion, your meditation is immeasurably deepened.

One last warning: please do not try to connect the passage to a physiological function, such as heartbeat or breathing rhythm. Such a connection may seem helpful initially, but it can cause serious problems later. When you give your full attention to the passage, your breathing cycle slows down naturally and all the functions of the body begin to work in harmony; there is no need to force them into line.

As we go through the day we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action. . . . We are then in much less danger of excitement, fear, anger, worry, self-pity, or foolish decisions. We become much more efficient. We do not tire so easily, for we are not burning up energy foolishly as we did when we were trying to arrange life to suit ourselves.

– *Alcoholics Anonymous*, pp. 87–88

Benefits

Sustained concentration on inspired words day by day drives them deep into consciousness. There they take root and begin to grow, bringing about quiet but wonderful changes in the way we think, act, and live.

Once you are practicing meditation sincerely and systemati-

the first day. In plain language say, “I’m sorry, but if you run away from the passage, you will have to go back to the beginning and start again.”

The mind will pale on hearing that, and for a while it will be hesitant to leave. It may stand up, look around, glance at you, perhaps meander over near the door. But you should not apply the penalty yet – the door is still closed; the mind has not gone out. As long as you are on the passage and have not forgotten about it completely, even if there is some division of attention, don’t apply the penalty; just concentrate harder.

But when the door has opened, when the mind has jumped in its sports car and sped away, when you find yourself in a dress shop or a bookstore or at the beach, act promptly. Go up and tap the mind gently on the shoulder. It will probably cringe and say, “You’re furious with me, aren’t you?”

Still another trick, the rascal! It actually wants you to become angry and start scolding, because then it won’t have to return to the passage. Don’t get impatient or rattled. Say with perfect courtesy, “This is a poor time to go browsing for a best-seller. Won’t you kindly rejoin me in the room where we’re meditating on the Prayer of St. Francis?” And gently take the mind back to the first line: “Lord, make me . . .”

If the escape occurred during the second stanza, start at the beginning of that stanza. This is hard work, and the mind will get the point.

Bringing the mind back when it strays is like training a puppy. Though you may have to do it many times, this is not

a pointless activity, not a wasted effort. Saint Francis de Sales explains, “Even if you did nothing during the whole of your prayer but bring your mind back and place it again in our Lord’s presence, though it went away every time you brought it back, your time would be very well employed.”

Occasionally the mind may try the old tape recorder ruse. You are repeating correctly, “It is in giving that we receive,” when a garbled version comes on: “It is in grabbing that we receive.” If this happens, don’t become agitated and try forcefully to turn off this unwelcome sound track. You may believe that you can do this with some effort, but actually you will only amplify the distracting voice. By dwelling on it, by struggling against it, you simply make it more powerful. The best course is to attend more to the true words of the Prayer. The more attention you give them, the less you will be giving to the garbled version. When your attention rests completely on the passage, there can be no attention on anything else.

So when distractions come, just ignore them. When, for instance, you are acutely aware of noises around you while meditating, concentrate harder on the words of the passage.

What used to be the hunch or the occasional inspiration gradually becomes a working part of the mind. . . . Our thinking will, as time passes, be more and more on the plane of inspiration. We come to rely upon it.

–*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 87

Whichever you choose, you may find it helpful to have support for your back.

On the other hand, don’t make yourself too comfortable or you will fall asleep. Tension comes because the mind is divided; concentration, a unified mind, brings relaxation. One of the first effects of meditation is that your neuromuscular system begins to relax, causing you to feel drowsy. It is important right from the outset not to yield to this tendency. When you feel you are growing sleepy and letting the meditation passage slip through your fingers, draw yourself away from your back support and sit up straight until the wave of sleep passes over.

As the body can fail its purpose for lack of nourishment, so can the soul. We all need the light of God’s reality, the nourishment of His strength, and the atmosphere of His grace. To an amazing extent the facts of A.A. life confirm this ageless truth.

–*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, pp. 97–98

With all this talk about the mind, it is important not to forget the body’s needs too: adequate sleep every night, nourishing food in reasonable quantities, and lots of vigorous movement. Without a balance between physical activity and meditation, we may become irritable or restless. Exercise – jogging, swimming, climbing, hard work, and so forth for young people, and walking for just about everybody – can help greatly.

Strong emotions may be activated during meditation. A few get so moved they weep. Such a purging of pent-up emotion may

Place

Choose a place for meditation that is quiet, clean, cool, and airy. If you have a small room that you can devote to this purpose, you will find that is a great advantage. If you cannot have a room, set aside a special corner. Reserve that place for meditation and spiritual reading only. Don't discuss other topics there; don't read other books there; don't use that place for any other activities. Gradually you will associate that place with meditation. Then you will find that simply going there begins to calm your mind.

You might find it helpful to meditate with others. Ideally, the whole family can have the same room and meditate together; it strengthens their relationships. Similarly, even if they don't live in the same house, two or three friends can gather together in one home for morning and evening meditation. You will remember

If circumstances warrant, we ask our wives or friends to join us in morning meditation. If we belong to a religious denomination which requires a definite morning devotion, we attend to that also.

—*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p.87

that Jesus said, "Where two or three come together in my name, I am present among them."

Posture

Where posture in meditation is concerned, the most important thing is to choose a position comfortable enough that you forget your body while keeping your spinal column erect. You may sit cross-legged on the floor or in a straight-backed chair.

The Inspirational Passage

You may wonder why I recommend an inspirational passage for meditation. First, it is training in concentration. Most of our mental powers are so widely dispersed that they are relatively ineffective. When I was a boy, I used to hold a lens over paper until the sun's rays gathered to an intense focus and set the paper aflame. In meditation, we gradually focus the mind so that when we meet a difficulty, we can cut right through the nonessentials.

Second, we begin to resemble and actually become whatever we give our attention to. People who think and dream about money have minds pervaded by dimes and dollars, shares and properties, profit and loss. Everything they see, everything they do, is colored by this concern.

Similarly with those who dwell on power, revenge, pleasure, or fame. As the Buddha said, "All that we are is the result of what we have thought." Today, despite our technology and science, people are most insecure because they persist in thinking about and going after things that have no capacity to give them security.

An inspirational passage turns our thoughts to what is permanent, to those things that put a final end to insecurity. In meditation, the passage becomes imprinted on our consciousness. As we drive it deeper and deeper, the words come to life within us, transforming all our thoughts, feelings, words, and even deeds.

For this reason, please don't try to improve upon the words of the Prayer or change them in any way. Just as they stand, they embody the spiritual wisdom of Saint Francis. When Ali Baba wanted to enter the cave of the forty thieves, he had to have the

right password. He could yell out, “Open, brown rice” or “Open, shredded wheat” forever, but nothing was going to happen until he said, “Open, sesame.” Meditate on Saint Francis’s own words, and you will find that you begin to resonate with the spirit of self-forgetfulness and love that the words contain.

In meditation, debate has no place. We rest quietly with the thoughts of someone who knows, so that we may experience and learn. –*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, p. 100

Using the same passage over and over is fine at the outset, but in time, the words may seem stale. You may find yourself repeating them mechanically, without sensitivity to their meaning.

I suggest you frequently memorize new pieces from the scriptures and the great mystics of the world so you will have a varied repertoire. And avoid choosing passages that are negative, that take a harsh and deprecatory view of the body, of our past mistakes, or of life in the world. We want to draw forth our positive side, our higher Self, and the passages should move you to become steadfast, compassionate, and wise.

On awakening let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead . . . Before we begin, we ask God to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives. –*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 86

Time

The best time for meditation is early in the morning – as early as you can reasonably make it. Starting the day early enables you to take a short walk or do some exercises, meditate, and have a leisurely breakfast with your family or friends. It sets a relaxing mood for the rest of the day. The dawn brings freshness, renewal.

Provide half an hour for meditation. Less than this will not really give your mind time to slow down its usual pace. If you want to meditate more, add half an hour in the evening.

You may find it difficult at first to sit still for thirty minutes. The mind is a restless creature, and it will do its best to convince you that you simply can’t sit there another minute; you have to be up and doing. Teaching this compulsively restless mind to subside is one of the main reasons you are meditating!

Actually, it is best not to be concerned about time during meditation itself. Whenever you are aware of time, a distracting element has entered. Once you start meditating, forget about time. There is no need to keep checking the clock; with practice you will be able to time your meditation pretty well.

Of course, having ample time for meditation helps free you from worrying about when to stop. Another good reason for getting up early! In this way you won’t have to cut things too closely. Twenty-nine minutes for meditation, fourteen minutes for breakfast, eight minutes to complete a project before you leave – you know the story. Give yourself plenty of time for all the essential activities.