

## THE BIG IDEAS

### “I Love Storms.”

Do you?

### Eudaimantra

Train your mind.

### End All Boredom

Via intense focus.

### Time

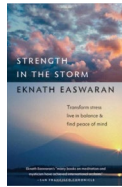
Is an infinite cosmic carpet.

### The Secret of Life

In one sentence.

### Gandhi 101

How to make yourself fearless.



# Strength in the Storm

Transform Stress, Live in Balance, and Find Peace of Mind

BY EKNATH EASWARAN · NILGIRI PRESS © 2013 · 184 PAGES

“‘Emergencies and crises,’ the psychologist William James observed, ‘show us how much greater our vital resources are than we had supposed.’ This is the opportunity that crises and challenges offer us. Every one of us has capacities inside us that we have never dreamed of, which we can learn to draw on in our daily lives. That is our legacy as human beings.

The purpose of this book is to help you get started on the great adventure by claiming this legacy. As a meditation teacher, I have to point out that this is the purpose of meditation, which I have explained in other books. Here I want to focus on skills you can apply right away: simple techniques that anyone can use to banish worry and anxiety, stay calm under pressure, and live each moment to its fullest — and most significantly, radiate that new-found calm to everyone around.”

~ Eknath Easwaran from *Strength in the Storm*

As I mentioned in the other Notes on his work, Eknath Easwaran is one of my favorite teachers.

Easwaran was a professor of English literature in India before coming to America on a Fulbright scholarship. He taught at UC Berkeley and became one of the world’s leading meditation and spiritual teachers.

In addition to the Notes we created on his translations of the [Bhagavad Gita](#) and the [Dhammapada](#) (if you’re looking for translations of those classics, I highly (!) recommend his), we also have Notes on [Conquest of Mind](#), [Take Your Time](#), [Passage Meditation](#), and [Your Life Is Your Message](#).

In this book, we learn how to love storms—how to use simple tools to find strength in the inevitable storms of life as we “transform stress, live in balance and find peace of mind.”

It’s a great, practical, quick-reading book that Easwaran’s wife, Christine, put together after he passed away. (Get a copy [here](#).)

It’s packed with Big Ideas and I’m excited to share a few of my favorites so let’s jump straight in!

## “I LOVE STORMS” - GANDHI

“Few human beings are born with the skill to weather storms and stress with grace. Yet everyone can learn. We can’t control the weather outside, but we can control how we respond. ...

For it is in the mind that the storms of life really blow. What matters is not so much the turmoil outside us as the weather within. To a person with an agitated mind, something as minor as a rude driver can cause enough stress to ruin a day. By contrast I think of Mahatma Gandhi, who gave himself away when he confessed, ‘I love storms.’ Gandhi began life as a timid child, but he learned to keep his mind so steady that he could face tremendous crises with courage, compassion, wisdom, and even a sense of humor.

*“Steadiness of mind is one of the most practical of skills. Nothing is more vital than learning to face turmoil with courage, confidence, and compassion. Fortunately, we already possess these capacities. But we need a calm mind to draw on them. That is the practical importance of a calm mind.”*

~ Eknath Easwaran

*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."*

~ Saint Teresa of Avila

This steadiness of mind is one of the most practical skills. Without it, no one can face the challenges of life without breaking. And life today is challenging to say the least. We live in the midst of conflicts — within ourselves, at home, in the community, even nationally and internationally. This is an age of conflict, which makes it an age of anxiety as well. Nothing is more vital than learning to face this turmoil with confidence and compassion."

"I love storms," says Gandhi. And I love that, Gandhi.

How about you? Do you like storms? Or do you wish you could sail right back home to the safe harbor once the slightest breeze kicks up? We've gotta learn to LOVE the storms.

OMMS-style.

"Obstacles make me stronger." (More on the power of mantras in a moment.)

Remember: "A ship in harbor is safe — but that is not what ships are built for."

And this wisdom from Epicurus is worth reflecting on: "The greater the difficulty the more the glory in surmounting it. Skillful pilots gain their reputation from storms and tempests."

Personal story to bring the wisdom to life: I found myself feeling a little more stress than normal earlier this week. I had spent the prior 100 days architecting a plan to acquire a 5-acre campus here in Ojai—dreaming and strategizing about all the ways we could use the space to serve the community and catalyze our business. The potential was astonishingly awesome.

Then, we couldn't get the proper permits from the County to make it all happen in a way that made sense for us.

Sad face. Storm.

Now, intellectually, I was fine with flipping the switch to the "off" position and moving on as we have an infinite number of ways to serve profoundly and be on Purpose to help people Optimize while fulfilling our Mission to change the world one person at a time, together.

Emotionally, there was the disappointment of not being able to move forward and a few challenging conversations. But the most challenging thing for me energetically was the fact that I temporarily lost my clear sense of direction. I didn't have a clear sense of what our next "port" would be and I was entertaining a couple too many options. (Hah.)

Perfect way to create a nice little storm!

I love the way Earl Nightingale puts it in [Lead the Field](#) where he tells us: "If you should visit a ship in port and ask the captain for his next port-of-call, he'll tell you in a single sentence. Even though the captain cannot see his port, his destination, for full 99% of the voyage, he knows it's there, and barring an unforeseen and highly unlikely catastrophe, he'll reach it. All he has to do is keep doing certain things every day. If someone asked you for your next port-of-call, your goal, could you tell him? Is your goal clear and concise in your mind? Do you have it written down? It's a good idea."

As I experienced this little jolt of stress, I remembered how much I struggled earlier in my life when I didn't have a clear sense of direction. The fundamentals are unbelievably important—ESPECIALLY when we're in the middle of a storm—but it's also \*really\* important to have a very clear sense of direction. The Captain of our Soul needs a next port of call.

Once I locked in on the new vision and clearly defined my next target (deliberately saying "No!" to other nice, but not essential paths), it was easy to regain equanimity.

How about you?

What's your next port?

You can't do everything. Choose what you think is the next most worthy target and go rock it!!

*"A calm mind has great power. It generates calm around it - a field of peace in which anger, fear, and violence subside. By learning to calm the mind, each of us can become an instrument of peace."*

~ Eknath Easwaran

## EUDAIMANTRA

"You can draw on the power of the mantram like this at any time, wherever you happen to be, whatever you happen to be doing. But if you want the mantram to come to your rescue when you need it, if you want it to steady your mind in times of turmoil, you need to practice, practice, practice in calm weather.

Whenever you get a moment free, unless you are doing something that requires attention, repeat your mantram to yourself silently, in your mind—while waiting, walking, washing dishes, and especially when falling asleep at night. Constant repetition drives the mantram deep into consciousness, where it can anchor your mind so surely that no amount of agitation can sweep you away.

I must have given this advice a million times, but it can never be repeated too often. Throughout my life, no matter how assiduously I practiced this skill, I have always been able to find more time, additional opportunities to put it to use. This is how we can gradually extend sovereignty over the mind."

Easwaran is ALL about CONSTANTLY training our minds via our mantram.

As in, CONSTANTLY.

(Note: Every spare moment. (Emphasis on every!))

There are a number of reasons for this.

Here's a quick look at the top 2:

First, we waste a TON of energy letting our minds spin backwards into the past and forward into the future. That drains our vitality.

Second, and even more importantly, if we let our minds run around like a crazy puppy all day every day, we're not going to be able to settle it down when we \*really\* need it—aka when life hits us with a storm. (You know those times when you just can't turn your brain off?)

Therefore, we'd be wise to train our minds all day every day. (As Easwaran says, you don't train a puppy 30 minutes a day and then let it run wild the rest of the day. Same with our minds. We must be consistent in our training if we want it to be well trained.)

So, there are a number of ways to train our minds. In the next Idea we'll talk about being super present and bringing your full attention to each moment. For now, let's chat about the mantra.

I'm personally excited to give this practice a shot. I'm finally sold on its power.

The question becomes, what mantra shall I/we use? Easwaran walks us through choosing our mantra. If you're Christian you may like the name of Jesus. Catholics may want to go for "Hail Mary" or "Ave Maria." Easwaran loves Gandhi's mantra "Rama, Rama"—which is the name of a Hindu God that means the source of joy.

All of those are cool but just don't quite land for me. Easwaran's wife Christine explicitly tells us not to pick our own mantra but... (laughing...) I like being a bit of an Iconoclast and I found myself thinking about what would really resonate with me.

I wondered what some of my favorite Stoic philosophers would use as a mantra. (And I briefly contemplated "Socrates," "[Epictetus](#)," and "[Aurelius](#)" as mantras but those are a little weird.)

Then it hit me: *Daimon*.

Context: The whole point of ancient wisdom and modern science (and all of our work together) is to help us increase our well-being so we can be a beneficial presence on the planet (while enjoying the journey).

*"Attention doesn't wander because a job is dull. It's the other way around: a job seems dull when we allow our attention to wander."*

~ Eknath Easwaran

As we discuss in [Stoicism 101](#), the Greek word for happiness is *eudaimonia*. It literally means "good soul." (*eu* = good + *daimon* = soul) (I have goosebumps as I write that.)

If we want to be happy—in the deepest, most flourishing sense of the word—we need to prioritize having a *really* good relationship with our inner daimon.

The Stoics tell us that we want to constantly (!!!) have our inner soul-guide in our minds. Doing our best, living with *areté*, engaging in the micro-moments of virtue that make him/her proud.

Yep. "*Daimon. Daimon. Daimon.*" That's it.

A mantra that invites the highest within me to be ever-present. I'll take it.

## WANT TO END ALL BOREDOM? ATTENTION IS THE KEY

"Then I made an even more surprising discovery: by giving them my full attention, such jobs actually lost their drudgery. Many even became interesting. I had got it backwards: attention doesn't wander because something is dull; life seems dull when attention wanders. Again, full attention was the key."

That's a very Big Idea.

Our minds don't wander because something is dull.

Life feels dull when we let our minds wander.

Solution: Give EVERYTHING you've got to whatever task you're working on (especially the dull ones!) and watch your vitality soar.

Easwaran shares that wisdom in the context of his experience as an English professor early in his career. In addition to teaching a full load and all his other responsibilities, he had to read 150 freshman essays on *Romeo and Juliet* and "mark the same misspellings over and over."

He didn't find that particularly interesting. He says: "Most of us on the faculty had a tendency to postpone paperwork, and as for reaching student papers, my mind would usually come up with the same old thought: 'I don't like this! If we can't put it off, let's get it over with as quickly as possible so we can do something interesting.' You should have seen the look on my mind's face when I began to reply, 'I don't care if you don't like it. We're going to give complete attention to this task even if it seems like drudgery.'"

How about you?

What task do *you* find especially boring?

Try giving it ALL of your energized attention and see what happens.

## TIME AS AN INFINITE COSMIC CARPET

"Time has been illustrated to be an infinite cosmic carpet that is always rolled up behind and before us. One day comes and it is unrolled from the future, and that evening it is rolled up again. The only part of the carpet that is open is the present moment.

The Buddha would go farther. There is no such thing as the past, he would say. It has been rolled up; it doesn't exist. Nothing remains of it but what we hold in our minds. And there is no such thing as the future; it has yet to be rolled out.

That is why attention flowing to the past is energy wasted. We are dumping our vitality into a black hole! The same is true of the future: looking forward to pleasant events, worrying about unpleasant ones, fantasizing about dreams coming true is simply energy drained away, like letting your car idle in the garage all night. When the mind stays present, all this vitality comes back to us."

*"We live where our attention is. When we direct our attention fully to the present moment, we are fully alive."*  
~ Eknath Easwaran

Imagine that infinite cosmic carpet.

The past is rolled up behind us. The future is rolled up ahead of us.

The ONLY part of that carpet that is open is this moment. Right now.

If we're spending all of our time thinking about the past or dreaming about the future, we're dissipating our precious life force.

Want it back?

Stay present.

Right now. And now. And now. And now. And now.

Give life your FULL attention.

Watch your vitality soar.

## THE SECRET OF LIFE (IN ONE SENTENCE)

"All of us want to be completely alive, to live one hundred percent in the present moment. What prevents us? More urgently, how can we bring about such a state of mind?"

The great American psychologist [William James] gives us a clue in a quotation I found in a most unexpected place, *Vogue* magazine. (Actually, it was Christine who found it.) This is a direct quotation: "The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will. An education which should include this faculty would be the education *par excellence*."

In that one sentence we have the secret of life: the key to genius, to success, to love, to happiness, to security, to fulfillment. We live where our attention is. If attention wanders all over the map, our lives cannot help being scattered, shallow, and confused. By contrast, complete concentration is the secret of genius in any field. Those who can put their attention on a task or goal and keep it there are bound to make their mark in life."

First, this is always worth repeating:

*"The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will. An education which should include this faculty would be the education par excellence."*

Agreed. This is why we come back to this in our educational work together!

Mastery of attention is (echo echo!) THE most essential skill.

In fact, it's the secret of life.

Want to be a genius? Concentrate all your energy on a task or goal and KEEP IT THERE over the gritty long run. You are bound to make your mark.

Want to have great relationships? Put your iPhone away when you're with your loved ones and put your attention on them and their awesomeness. Repeat in each of your micro-moments of positivity resonance day in and day out.

Want to have happiness, security, fulfillment? Again, train your attention to focus on what's within your control, choosing the most empowered responses to any situation while you see the beauty in your world.

The secret of life. Attention.

Let's make our marks in the world as we deeply connect with others and joyfully celebrate it all.

*"If we don't seem to have much effect on the world we live in, it's because the signal we broadcast is weak and confused. It is the concentrated, focused mind that reaches people. All the great changes in the world for good and for ill have come from the impact of men and women with an overriding singleness of purpose and a concentrated mind. In our own times, on the positive side, Gandhi is a perfect example."*

~ Eknath Easwaran

## HOW TO MAKE YOURSELF FEARLESS (GANDHI 101)

"Today we would ask, 'What kind of therapy did he undergo? What workshops did he attend?' But Gandhi never set out to make himself fearless. He simply began trying to serve those around him, spending less and less time on indulging himself and more on helping others. And the primary skill he used to support himself in these efforts was repetition of the mantram. Effort and the mantram together changed fear into fearless, anger into compassion, hatred into love.

That transformation is the reason I consider Gandhi a beacon for our times. 'I have learnt through bitter experience,' he said, 'the one supreme lesson to conserve my anger, and as heat conserved is transmuted into energy, even so our anger controlled can be transmuted into a power which can move the world.' He added, 'I have not the slightest doubt that any man or woman can achieve what I have, if he or she would make the same effort and cultivate the same hope and faith.'"

Did you know that Gandhi was an incredibly timid boy and equally fearful young man? When he started his law practice in South Africa he couldn't get himself to speak in his first court case. He returned his client's fees and literally rushed out of the courtroom humiliated.

Then, he transformed himself. He became an absolutely fearless leader. How did he do it?

He dedicated himself to a cause bigger than himself and fiercely disciplined his mind (and body).

The moral of the story: If Gandhi can do it, so can we. We just need to put in the same level of effort. Let's do that as we strive to navigate life heroically, learning to love the storms as they give us a chance to put all this stuff into practice.

I salute you and your inner daimon. Let's do this!

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
Chief Philosopher

If you liked this Note,  
you'll probably like...

[Conquest of Mind](#)

[Passage Meditation](#)

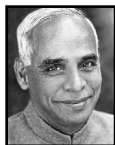
[Your Life Is Your Message](#)

[The Dhammapada](#)

[The Bhagavad Gita](#)

## About the Author of "Strength in the Storm"

EKNATH EASWARAN



Eknath Easwaran is respected around the world as an authentic guide to timeless wisdom, and as the author of passage meditation, an eight-point program of universal spiritual practices that includes slowing down and one-pointed attention. In 1961 he founded the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, which carries on his work with publications and retreats. Easwaran's books on spiritual living have been published in 26 languages. His translations of the Indian spiritual classics are bestsellers in English, and more than 1.5 million of his books are in print. Connect: [easwaran.org](http://easwaran.org).

## About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at [optimize.me](http://optimize.me).