



Svaroopaa® Vidya Ashram

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Quick Fixes #4

A New Normal

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You know you should be happy for your friend, even celebrating their good fortune, but your mind keeps churning out negativity. When you see someone suffering, you want to be kind and compassionate, but schadenfreude prevails; you're enjoying their misery. Everyone excuses it as "just human nature." But you're creating your own pain, which is caused by your own repetitive thoughts. Yoga holds the bar higher, urging you to find a higher quality within. Instead of being trapped in human nature, what is the human capacity? What are you like when your heart is full?

Yoga urges you to cultivate the inner qualities that shine from your Divine Essence. Instead of succumbing to pettiness, even insensitivity or spite, you dig a little deeper and find a warm-hearted way of being with others. Not only is it good for your relationships, it's good for your body and mind. It improves your meditation. It uplifts your life.

Maitrii-karunnaa-muditopek.saa.naa,m sukha-du.hkha-pu.nya-apu.nya-vi.sayaana.m
bhaavanaata's citta-prasaadanam — Patanjali's Yoga Sutras 1.33

Cultivate friendliness towards happiness,
compassion towards misery, gladness towards virtue
and indifference toward vice, in order to purify your mind

Your mind spends too much time on an internal commentary, actively blocking your own inner light. The most effective form of self-sabotage is constant sniping about others. It's like you're flinging mud at others but getting very muddy in the process. Thus, yoga focuses on how you use your mind. All the poses and breathing practices are predominantly for their effect on your mind — calming, soothing and quieting it. The underlying premise is that, when your mind is quiet, your deeper essence shines through.

Only 33% of Americans say they are "very happy."¹ This means that more than half are just muddling along; this is the norm. For a yogi, attaining the norm is not nearly enough. Only those below the norm aspire to normalcy. Yogis aspire higher.

While 29% of Aussies² say they are "happier than the average person," 2/3 of Canadians say they are "very happy."³ This is an improvement over what Americans report but, for a yogi, mere happiness is not enough. Yoga's goal is that you live in the ever-expanding bliss of Self-Knowingness, svaroopavidya. It's a whole new kind of normal. It changes the way you deal with the world.

Hearing of another's joy often triggers a negative internal reaction, so yoga's ancient sage recommends you cultivate "friendliness towards happiness." Instead of saying things that cut them down, instead of thinking that they don't deserve such happiness, instead of talking behind their back, be friendly towards their happiness. All capacities are already there inside you, so simply draw on your inherent capacity for friendliness. Be friendly toward their happiness. You could even congratulate them!

It's hard to hear of another's misery. Compassion arises when you see an injured dog or news reports of the latest disaster. However, you may feel differently when you see a homeless person or a family member stuck in a downward spiral. Your mind loves to hop on the bandwagon of criticism and blame, even singing a little ditty that goes, "I told you so, I told you so."

Compassion is a response that arises from deep within. Allow it to arise or actively go looking for it in there. You may want to help improve the situation or you may recognize that you cannot take care of the problem, but you can feel compassion nonetheless.

¹ <https://goo.gl/wDeQsp> ² <https://goo.gl/3L8EWc> ³ <https://goo.gl/dacYH9>

Someone tells you they're quitting smoking, going on a diet or stepping away from a harmful relationship. Be glad for them! Even if they've tried it before, avoid the negative predictions and doubting Thomas stance. While such thoughts undermine their efforts, worse, they destabilize your inner state. You may decide to support them, offer encouragement or needed help. Whether or not you're be able to be involved, you can cultivate "gladness towards their virtue."

Patanjali recommends you cultivate "indifference towards vice." Actively taught in Al-Anon, this is not about changing others' behaviour but is about handling your inner state and needs. When you see misconduct, even wickedness or corruption, don't get all wrought up. Cultivate indifference. You may have to act, or possibly not, but you don't have to get agitated about it.

This is not about shirking your responsibilities. Certain people in your life have a right to your loving care and guidance, even tough love. You care about them. But do you have to get upset in order to show that you care?

Whether it is their happiness or misery, virtue or vice, you're used to using your agitation to motivate your actions. Yogic actions come from clarity and love, which motivate your choice-full action. Not only do you feel better in the process, so do the others that you are trying to help.

You may see that someone needs to change. You might even be right about it. You could decide to work with them on it. This only becomes a problem for you when your happiness depends on them changing. Any time your happiness depends on something external to you, you are going to be unhappy most of the time. This is called "normal." For yogis, normal is not good enough.

These four strategies are ultimately not about changing the world or anyone else. They are about changing yourself, specifically polishing the gem of your mind. When a jewel is dirty, the light doesn't shine through it. Cleaning it makes a huge difference; the same happens to your mind. That yogic change opens up your inner experience of svaroopaa, your own Self. Now, what you bring to the situation changes. You have more to offer, which helps with the change needed in the world.

Still, it's not about the world changing. However much you can offer to others or accomplish in the world, yoga is about where you come from, within yourself. Just like going to school gave you skills to apply in the world, your yogic skills make you more skillful in the world and in your relationships. Yet the skillful one is you. Yoga's practices help you grow into your Self, which you discover to be more than you thought you were.

This quick fix is very easy, though remembering it requires a little effort. When I first began this practice, I put reminder notes everywhere, listing the four situations along with the quality to cultivate for each:

happiness — friendliness.

misery — compassion.

virtue — gladness.

vice — indifference.

Yoga says, in dealing with your mind, first you have to apply this practice to how you see and react to others. Once you get good at that, you may be able to apply it to yourself. I found this to be true. It took me a couple of weeks to even be able to remember the list.

As I continued the practice, I began to see the connections between things. Only then was I able to apply the practice to my own happiness, misery, virtue and vice. That broke up the logjam that had been holding me back. What freedom! Do more yoga.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES ON "QUICK FIXES"

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