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# YOGA!

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## Don't Worry—Be Happy



*Abhyasa vairaghabhyam tan  
nirodhah*

By practice and detachment the  
fluctuations of the mind can be  
stopped.

- Patanjali: Sutra 1-12



Can you recall your excitement when you were first allowed to help with a 'grown-up' task? After the task lost its volunteerism and was an assigned chore, how long did you enjoy it? Did washing the dishes

remain a game very long after it became a daily assignment, when you had to do it everyday, come what may? I often hear people talk about their lack of discipline when it comes to yoga practice, meditation or exercise. There's never enough time, there are too many other more enjoyable things to do, they simply don't like it. I ask you, with all that, how can a person possibly succeed? With that mindset they are doomed before they begin. My job is to steer them towards activities that they enjoy (at least initially) and ask the questions that open the door to an attitude adjustment. I ask them to bring their enthusiastic, inquisitive, open-eyed child-wonder to their daily activities, to acknowledge value in everything they deem worthy of their time. That is *abhyasa*, usually translated as discipline which is defined as:

<sup>1</sup>Training that is expected to produce a specified character or pattern of behavior, especially that which is expected to produce moral or mental improvement.

<sup>2</sup>Controlled behavior resulting from such training.

Wouldn't it be great if we could get to the state described in the second definition without going through the first? I believe it's a possibility—by committing to a goal and squeezing every bit of joy from the activity possible. A commitment is a *state of being bound emotionally or intellectually to a course of action*. A person who tells me they lack discipline is often very disciplined. What they lack is commitment. What they need is to explore the interrogatives that bring them to the state of emotional commitment to their goals. An intellectual commitment, when it comes to life plans, is a good start but it doesn't see you through the daily grind. You must be passionately bound to your goals, and you must reap great rewards with each step you take towards them. Then, you will be there on the mat, on the cushion, in the gym, in the park every single day. Smiling.

What brings you joy every day? Seriously, stop reading and make a list. Do you find that there are some answers that fit only if the phrase 'every day' is removed? The important question now is, "why is that?" My yoga practice was a constant in my life. I could rely on it to instill a sense of joy, every day, every practice. Until my late 40's. The joy left me. I grieved my loss. I'm sure the absence of joy was merely a mood, a response to hormonal shifts, nothing more. But, this bad mood lasted for years. This was the first crisis of *abhyasa* I had suffered since my early 20's. To add to it all, I began to suffer structural damage: my sacroiliac was often painful, my knee often went out (and ultimately required surgery). I was unable to continue with the fitness activities I enjoyed and had to settle for second best. I was unhappy.

*The nine impediments which obstruct progress are disease, sluggishness, doubt, carelessness, idleness, sense gratification, living in the world of illusion, not being able to hold on to what is undertaken and inability to maintain the progress achieved.*

*Sorrow, dejection, restlessness of the body, inhalation and exhalation arise from these distractions.*

- Yoga Sutras 1.30-31