



Svaroopa® Vidya Ashram

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Quick Fixes #2

Assess Your Condition

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You have things that you do to make yourself feel better. They may be healthy and beneficial self-care routines or they may be mere coping mechanisms, but you have your ways. While yoga's tools work better than anything else, first you must notice your condition. Just like you keep an eye on your car's fuel level and oil pressure, you need to pay attention to how you're feeling and what you need.

Assess your condition. You don't have to wait until pain forces you to notice your body or anxiety sabotages your life. That would be like letting your car sputter to a halt instead of proactively filling your tank when it's getting low. An online search gives over 1 billion websites featuring self-care tips.

Obviously taking care of yourself is hard for most people. There are several possible reasons for this:

- Yoga takes such good care of you that you rarely notice you need anything.
- Taking care of other people takes most of your time and focus.
- Your focus on emotional needs blocks your awareness of your physical and mental condition.
- You want other people to take care of you, thus getting worse is a way of getting their attention.
- You're so used to feeling bad that you don't know what it would be like to feel good.
- Taking responsibility for your condition is hard because taking responsibility is hard.

Though the list is incomplete, the common denominator is your mind. Even simple physical care requires that you make a decision and initiate action. How much harder is it to manage your mind and emotions, much less cultivate a yogic state? The first step is to simply notice when you need help.

Fortunately, Patanjali gives you an easy way to assess your condition: if you are experiencing any of his four "symptoms," it's time to take care of yourself.

Dukha-daurmanasya-angamejayatva-shvaasa-prashvaasaa vikshepa-sahabhuvah

— Yoga Sutras 1.31

The four symptoms are pain, despair, nervousness and interrupted breathing. You don't have to be suffering from all of them in order to realize that it's time to take care of yourself. Any single one is a tipoff that you need to do more yoga:

duhkha = pain, whether physical pain, mental or emotional pain

When you're experiencing pain, the pain is not the problem. Pain is a symptom that there's a problem that needs your attention. Medicine mostly agrees with this perspective, though most doctors will treat the pain even when they don't know the cause or how to relieve it. At times, this is valuable, especially when the needed healing is already underway though it will take some time for the pain to abate.

Pain research has proven that those with a deep spiritual or religious perspective actually experience less pain than others. They report less pain, even after surgeries similar to other people, plus they need less pain medication and leave the hospital days earlier than others. Similarly, your mental and emotional pains dissolve when you surrender into the deep inner experience that *Svaroopa®* yoga provides. In sutra 1.3, Patanjali calls this inner experience "svaroopa," the experience of your own Divine Essence, which is where our yoga gets its name.

This means that, if you are experiencing the symptom of pain, you need to get grounded in a deeper level within.

daurmanasya = despair, frustration, depression, anguish

Everyone has these types of experiences. The World Health Organization says that 300 million people around the world are suffering from depression right now, while over 10 million American adults experienced an episode in the last year. Depression is an emotional condition, a way of backing out of things that are too toxic to handle.

Despair is a spiritual disease. Called “the dark night of the soul” by St. John of the Cross, it’s the loss of Self, an existential angst hidden under all your internal craziness. When despair is exposed for you to see it, your usual coping mechanisms don’t work because they merely work on your mind and emotions and provide temporary relief. Despair is deeper. It demands a more lasting answer. That answer is found within, by exploring and experiencing your own spirituality. This is *Svaroopa*® yoga’s specialty.

angamejayatva = nervousness, shaking of your limbs, lack of control over your body

In extremes, you might shake with terror or tears, even losing the ability to stand or walk properly. You can vibrate with ecstasy as well as energy. Even tremors are an indication of deeply hidden emotions that, unrecognized and unexperienced, are surfacing through your body. While Patanjali says it’s time to take care of yourself, a hot bath won’t be enough. By the time your body is so affected, your inner state is in extremis. You need to tap into your healing power. It arises from its inner source, which you reach by exploring your Divine Essence. You become nourished from the inside-out.

shvasa-prashvasah = irregular, shallow or interrupted breathing

Nice, smooth, easy, open breathing, like a sleeping baby. If your breath isn’t moving so freely, you’ve found one of Patanjali’s “symptoms.” When you notice your breath is interrupted, you can simply take a breath at any time, though you’re treating the symptom instead of addressing the cause. The cause is your mental-and-emotional state. You hold your breath so you won’t feel the feelings that are surfacing or are just below the surface. Shallow breathing means you’re half-alive, while irregular and erratic breathing means your mind is fragmented.

You’re not supposed to be doing Ujjayi Pranayama all the time. Instead, your breath is supposed to be easy, rhythmic and slow-paced. The benefit aerobic exercisers get is not found in the speed and force of their movements; it’s found in the ease of their breath when they are not exercising. Ujjayi Pranayama gives you the same aerobic benefits, while opening inner access to your own Self. When you find your Self, you find the source of your breath and a whole new way to live — easy and free.

in addition to the four symptoms, there’s a mystical secret hidden in this sutra. Patanjali explains their common cause: *विक्षेप* vik.sepa (vik-SHAY-paw) — distracted mind. He means your mind is distracted from your deeper essence. Instead of looking inward to find the source of joy and vitality, you’re chasing after specific objects in the world as well as specific people. You want to get happiness from outside, so you keep trying, even destroying yourself in the process.

You’re like an athlete who trains too hard, causing an injury that prevents them from ever playing their sport again. Except you’re not playing; this is not a game. It’s a life-and-death matter to you; everything depends on your life going a certain way or you feel like you’re going to die.

The truth is that you are immortal. You are the One Consciousness that is being everything — Shiva. Shiva is being all while being you, but you don’t look inward to see who is looking out. This is yoga’s specialty: to give you your own Self. What do you do? Patanjali’s next sutra says (loosely): when you’re experiencing a symptom that you’re distracted from your own Divine Essence, apply a yogic remedy so you find your Self again. Pick one thing and do it every time.

This month, try this Quick Fix: do a few Ujjayi breaths, anywhere and anytime. Do it quietly enough that no one notices. It’s your little secret. Do one minute, it will probably be 5-8 breaths. Maybe you can even stop everything for 60 seconds. You can do it while you’re stopped at a red traffic signal or simply pull your car over to the side of the road. You can repeat mantra while you’re doing it, of course. Now you’re doing more yoga.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES ON “QUICK FIXES,” OUR THEME FOR 2019, AUTHORED BY
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