



Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

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Quick Fixes #10

The Experience & Experencer

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On a roller coaster, with the cars inching toward the top of the first rise, are you experiencing thrills of joy or stark terror? Or perhaps you are experiencing both at the same time. In the midst of it all, ask yourself, “Who is experiencing this?” You are not your experience. You are the experencer.

When you know that you are the experencer, you ride the ups and downs of the roller coaster with a different inner quality. The same is true in the ups and downs of your life. My Baba made this teaching very easy for us to understand. He asked, “Who were you when you were a child?” Each time he asked, I was propelled back to my childhood, but not focusing on the events. I found the me that I was then, which is the same me that I am now.

You are the same you now that you were when you were a child. On the outside, your body has changed, even your personality or likes and dislikes have changed. Your life has changed in many ways. Yet you are still the same you that you were when you were a child. This is your own Self. This is your unchanging inner essence, your own beingness. You always have been and always will be. Immortal, you existed before you were born and you continue to exist beyond your body’s capacity to sustain life. You are pure Consciousness, beingness-and-knowingness, the source of the universe, which yoga calls by the holy name “Shiva.” You are Shiva.

The One Divine Reality, being all, is being you. The whole point of yoga’s teachings is that you can know this. You can know your own Self. This is the goal and purpose of human life, to know who you really are. And you can do it in an instant by noticing who is having the experience you are having. This is your quick fix, an easy way to become your Self again.

This is not the same as practicing witness-consciousness. People often use “witnessing” as a way to distance themselves from their experiences, unfortunately. They back away from life and away from the others in their life, cultivating an aloof or analytical perspective that can suck all the joy out of life.

Instead, this yogic quick fix is for you to be in your experience, but to be the one who is experiencing the experience. Instead of getting lost in the event or the story, you simply know you’re having an experience while you’re having it.

One purpose of life is to have experiences, Patanjali tells us:

Prakaa”sa kriyaa sthiti “silam bhutendriyaat-maka.m bhoga-
apavarga artha.m drshyam.

— Yoga Sutras 2.18

The Seen (the world) consists of primal elements and sense-organs, has the qualities of clarity, movement and density, and is for the purpose of providing the Seer with experiences and liberation.

Everything happening in your life is for the purpose of giving you an experience as well as to help you become enlightened. Events are not one or the other. Both purposes are being fulfilled at the same time if you’re paying attention. Everything is helping you progress toward enlightenment while you’re having experiences. You can make this happen more smoothly as well as more powerfully by paying attention to your Self, the one who is having the experience.

You are the only one who has experienced your whole life so far. Some of your experiences happened when you were a child. Some were yesterday and today. Others came in between. But you are the same you that you were when you were a child. All your experiences have happened to that one you that you have always been.

What is the difference between “having an experience” and “being the one who is having the experience?” You’re used to looking at the experience, not who is having it. You moan and cry, “This is hard, it’s terrible.” You go on and on, repeatedly describing the event in detail. You get lost in the story. You become the story instead of the one that the story is about. Describing other events, you

laugh, “This is fantastic,” but you still focus on the event. Of course, it was happy/sad, good/bad, right/wrong, up/down, winter/summer, etc. But the one who experienced it was you, only you.

This practice makes you able to distinguish between mind and Self. Your mind is the servant of the Self. This is why your mind is always busy; it’s looking for experiences for the Self to have. Your own Self is Shiva. Shiva is being you, as well as being the world, in order to have experiences of himself in the multiplicity of forms he has become. As Shiva, you’re accomplishing this part of your life’s purpose — you’re having lots of experiences.

Yoga gives you the ability to know who you are while you are having your experiences. This fulfills the other part of your life’s purpose, to get enlightened. Kashmiri Shaivism says you can be a Maya-pramata or a Shiva-pramata. You are either an experiencer (pramata) of Maya, lost in the worldly process again, or you are an experiencer of Shiva, being the Divine reality that you already are, while in the midst of the world.

The first time I discovered this, I was playing the harmonium (a musical instrument) for a Sanskrit chant. Several hundred people were chanting, relying on the harmonium to keep them in the bliss of the chant. I and the other musicians had been playing for almost an hour and the chant was soon coming to a crescendo.

At one point, I looked at the drummer, then turned my gaze back down to the keyboard I was playing. I saw my hand moving across the keys but it didn’t look like “my” hand any more. I was singing into the microphone, but it wasn’t “my” voice any more. It was like God was moving my hand and using my voice. The internal pressures I’d been feeling were gone. My concern for doing it perfectly had vanished. It was like we were all moving together through eternal space, riding a current of Grace in the form of sound.

Soon after, I had the same experience while riding an honest-to-goodness roller coaster. Then I had it again while in a conversation with someone. I gradually learned to make this inner shift, to rely on this more expansive way of functioning by being my Self while being in the world.

All you have to do is be the experiencer. When you actually experience the experience you’re experiencing, you realize your Shiva-ness. You know your own Self in the midst of life. You are not the experience; you are the one who is having the experience.

Vi”se.sa-dar”sina aatma-bhaava-bhaavanaa-viniv.rtti.h.
Tadaa viveka-nimna.m kaivalya-praagbhaara.m chittam.

— Yoga Sutras 4.25-26

One who sees the difference between mind and Self becomes free from doubt and desire.

Their mind is naturally inclined toward liberation.

What a beautiful promise, that you will have a mind that is naturally inclined toward liberation! All you have to do is see the difference between mind and Self. The quick fix is to simply check inside and see WHO is having the experience you are having. Ask yourself this very simple question, “Who is having this experience?”

This is different than asking, “Who am I?” Questioning who you are is central to some meditation practices, but what I’m offering you here is different. My purpose is to keep you engaged in your life while you experience the deeper dimension of your own being. When you ask who is having your experience, you continue having the experience you’re having, while you see who is the experiencer.

With practice, you will experience a profound inner shift that expands your perception both outside and inside. You realize that you are the perceiver. You are the experiencer. You are the one living in your body. You are the one who has a mind. You have a life. You have relationships. All of this matters. It is the inner perceptual shift that makes it all make sense. In the inner shift, you settle into your Self, becoming more present in your life and in your being. Do more yoga.

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