

Creating Lasting Happiness

"When the restraints (non-attachment, truthfulness, non-stealing, moderation, non-greed) and Observances (purity, contentment, self-discipline, spiritual study, faith) are inhibited by perverse thoughts, the opposites should be thought of."
- The Yoga Sutras, Book II, Verse 33

IN TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS OF CLASSICAL YOGA, AN EARNEST STUDENT WOULD SPEND A MINIMUM OF THREE YEARS LEARNING THE PRACTICE OF ETHICAL LIVING, AS OUTLINED BY THE YOGA SUTRAS IN THE FORM OF THE YAMAS (RESTRAINTS) AND NIYAMAS (OBSERVANCES). In order to achieve these practices, students would spend their time reflecting on their behaviors in order to deepen their emotional understanding.

To bring full awareness to an emotion, one must attempt to go deeper in order to examine the issue beneath the emotion. This is not an easy process – it takes a lot of patience, fortitude and a willingness to move beyond attachment to the emotion itself. A strong emotion, when carried over time can become a limiting belief structure. Transmuting a negative emotion means cultivating the ability to focus on positive emotion in place of a negative one. It is called *Practicing the Opposite*.

There are seven major emotional states, and each has its opposite. They are: Laziness/Discipline, Fear/Courage, Anger/Love, Sadness/Joy, Worry/Faith, Despair/Hope and Selfishness/Selflessness. In this article, we are going to examine Despair and Hope, with the goal of learning how to confront despair and actively cultivate hope.

Despair means "loss of hope, hopelessness" and Hope can be defined as "trust, reliance or to long for with expectation or belief in fulfillment." Looking at these definitions, we can see that despair and hope are two sides of the same coin: hoped placed in a situation where results are unreliable soon turns to despair. Hope placed with spiritual perspective and detachment is also called dispassion.

Let's consider the concept of dispassion as it relates to the hope for good health. It is a normal thing that we all wish for good health for ourselves and for others around us. When we have someone we care for who is ill, immediate care for their illness comes in the form of doctors, nurses etc. If we are ill, we do everything we can to get well. There is an underlying assumption of wellness, which only viewed from the physical level. The holistic viewpoint of wellness looks at the spirit in tandem with the physical and psychological. The secret to ensuring wellness of spirit is dispassion – creating happiness based on spiritual fulfillment over physical well-being.

One aspect of Yoga philosophy explains human experience through the Koshas. The Koshas are also called sheaths, or layers of reality, and they include: the physical body, the energetic body, the emotional body, the intellectual body, the bliss body and absolute reality. They are all aspects of reality that can be experienced and remembered, and with the exception of the absolute reality, each one has qualities that are continually changing. The body changes every moment, energy levels are in a continual state of flux and the stability of the mind is easily swayed from moment to moment. The experience of bliss is fleeting for most, but absolute reality (the Universe, God, Allah, Nature, whatever you want to call it) remains constant.

With the Koshas in mind, we can see how our best hope is for a level of dispassion from external results. This dispassion offers us hope for the realization of the ultimate reality.



This being said, hope is sometimes a necessary emotion, especially in a state of extreme despair. Some of the practices that Yoga recommends for cultivating hope are pranayama (breathing exercises). By invigorating the body and mind through breath control, mood can be lifted. Meditation to cultivate the power of a concentrated mind can help break through the inertia of depression. Other activities that increase hope are spiritual practices like singing, drumming, prayer and worship. Refraining from negative self-talk, gossip or even watching the news can be helpful. Studying scriptures, self-help books or poetry in order to allow profound spiritual thoughts to penetrate the wisdom body.

In reality, when you are practicing dispassion, any activity that you do can connect you to the ultimate reality. This means that household chores, going to work and/or hobbies can be spiritual practices!

Remember what the Buddha said "All that we see is the result of what we have thought: we are formed and molded by our thoughts. Those whose minds are shaped by selfless thoughts give joy when they speak or act. Joy follows them like a shadow that never leaves." ▲