

Addictions

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Addictions are a desperate attempt to live in bliss. You have a baseline requirement for bliss, which you can call your Bliss Quotient (BQ). When you are not meeting your BQ, you go looking for something to create bliss. Unfortunately, the places you look have side effects. If the side effects damage your health, your mind, or your life, it is called "addiction." Drugs and alcohol are fairly easy to clarify this way. Now it is clear that food can fit into the addiction category. Work and exercise can also be addictions. All of them are used as catalysts to the inner experience of bliss. You may be using them to meet your basic BQ. Ram Dass once described how he decided to live in bliss by staying high on LSD all the time. He discovered after several days that it was impossible, because he could not handle basic life needs (like eating), and because the side effects were damaging his body. So he decided to go to the bliss experts, the yogis in India.

The ancient sages explain that you desire bliss because it is your nature. But, you are currently cut off from your true nature. Yoga, "union," is the resolving of this inner split so that you experience the natural bliss of your own Being. The internal split shows up in your internal dialogues — the endless conversations you have with yourself inside your head. It shows in your stooped posture and habitual facial expression, in your relationships (which often have a disturbingly repetitive quality), in your Freudian slips and more. It is easier to see others' internal splits than to see your own. Yet the split is there or you would be living in constant bliss, and you wouldn't need anything external to trigger it.

Bliss that is triggered by externals is temporary bliss. If your bliss comes from roller blading, you will only be in bliss while you are roller blading, or while you're talking about roller blading, or planning to go roller blading or buying roller blading supplies and magazines, etc. Your focus on roller blading will be complete, because roller blading is your catalyst to bliss. All your friends will take up roller blading, or you will make new friends with people you meet on wheels. When does it become defined as an addiction? Perhaps you could get a job teaching roller blading, in marketing or designing improvements in the products. Is it an addiction yet?

Yoga says the problem is not about addiction. The problem is that your bliss is temporary. It only happens when you are roller blading. You have a low BQ. Where is your bliss when you are eating or sleeping? What about your work and relationships, or when you are stuck in a traffic jam? You are stuck with "dependent bliss," meaning your bliss depends on something outside of you and is only temporary. Also, your bliss from roller blading is only partial. You are not a "perfect" roller-blader. You may fall down, or you have imperfect form. Or perhaps you are really good at it but your mind keeps running the litany of all your problems even when you are rolling along.

Bliss is more accessible than you think, but you have been looking for it in the wrong place. You need "independent bliss," not "dependent bliss." What you really want is the joy of being alive, like when you were a six-month-old baby and woke up with the sunrise every morning. Your parents might not have been joyful at that time in the morning, but you were alive and awake and ready for life. How can you get back to that?

Yoga is the Science of Bliss. Every technique of yoga is for the purpose of increasing your bliss. The first stage of bliss is relaxation, which progresses to a tingling aliveness throughout your whole body. Then it becomes a contagious joy that arises from inside, without any external cause. This bliss is more than merely physical. It can be accessed by a variety of yoga practices including yoga poses, breathing, chanting, meditation, contemplation, study of the ancient texts, and serving others.

Addictions are obsessions. Your mind obsesses on a means of getting bliss. That mental fixation impels you to repeat the activity that worked in the past. Even yoga can become an addiction, but there is a big difference. The bliss that yoga gives you is reliable and long-lasting. It has no negative side effects. It is cumulative, which means that the same yoga practices increasingly give you more

bliss. Best of all, yoga frees you from all addictions because it gives you direct access to the bliss of your own Being. "Life without bliss is a wasteland," Joseph Campbell said.

It is the nature of your mind to obsess on things. Your mind is trying to help you raise your BQ by obsessing on the things that have catalyzed bliss for you in the past. In addition, your mind is trying to help you raise your BQ by planning things so that you will experience bliss in the future. But your mind is missing the moment, for the now is where the bliss is. When you bring your mind into the present with your body (where you are located right now, what you are doing right now), you will experience bliss. At least you will relax, which is the first stage of bliss.

Each of the practices of yoga is for the purpose of stilling the relentless activity of your mind. That mental activity and the underlying anxieties distract you from the inherent bliss within you. Yoga quiets your mind so you can discover the bliss that is inside you. It has always been there. Bliss is what you experience when you are not worrying, ruminating or analyzing your life. It arises naturally when you quit looking for something outside of you. Yoga teaches you how.

Addictions are our "norm." Unfortunately, this "norm" or "being normal" is not a state of health or happiness. You have to actively do something to get out of the rut that everyone else is in. But you cannot do it with the tools you already have at hand. All the tools you have already learned to use, continue to produce what you have already experienced. Do you describe yourself as truly healthy and completely happy? The Western emphasis on rational-logical mind is excellent for business and competition, but not very useful for bliss. The question is, "Can an old dog (you) learn new tricks?" Try yoga!

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