

ATTACHMENT

To be attached is our natural state in all its fluctuations—kinship and connection as well as disappointment and loss. Nancy Jackson (Swami Dayananda) discusses how self-inquiry reveals what's behind emotional bonds and presents options for choice.

Attachment can be a good feeling. You can be attached to loved ones, your work, your neighbourhood and even the crumbling wall at the end of the street. Most attachments don't affect you adversely. The clothes you prefer to wear, the routine you follow, the people you like to spend time with—these are attachments that make you comfortable and bring pleasure.

Your emotional fabric is woven by attachment. It's only when attachment turns against you that it becomes troublesome, such as when you have a relentless craving or feel so stuck you are frozen in inaction. When attachment works against your state of health and well-being, it's time to look more closely. Yoga is always about balance and what is right for each individual. The practices of meditation and self-inquiry provide the skills to discover your personal attachments, and how they cause sorrow or bring joy.

RAGA: COLOURING YOUR WORLD

The Sanskrit word *raga* means attraction or attachment. It is desire, delight, an attentive interest in relation to any experience from the scent of a rose to a fond memory. *Dvesha* means dislike or aversion. It is the sense of don't-want or the impulse to turn away from potential pain. Naturally, these experiences can be mild or strong, fleeting or fanatic.

Every day is loaded with a variety of impulses of want, don't-want. If you'd like to test it, during the day, consider each of your choices. You want this for breakfast, not that. You wear this, not that. You venture forth this way, not that way. You are attracted or repelled, wanting pleasure, avoiding pain.

Raga also means coloured. The opposite, *vairagya*, means detachment or to become pale. We are coloured by our influences and understanding. The great nineteenth-century yogi Sri Ramakrishna used simple analogies

from everyday life. He said, "Bondage and liberation are of the mind alone. The mind will take the colour you dye it with."

The more consumed you are by your attractions, the more colour they carry. You may recognize how colour and passion are connected. To see red is to be angry, blue is to feel down, green is envy, and when things look black trouble is ahead.

Scholars, artists, cooks, and horse-trainers all tap into passion to practice their crafts. Activists thrive on it and collectors transform enthusiasm into expertise. Passion can fly freely, or capture us for awhile, sometimes even years, then naturally release as it runs its course. Any of these can be deep attachments that enrich our lives.

Lorin Roche, in his book *The Radiance Sutras*, says, "Each of the passions sends signals through your whole body and makes your chakras



spin with a different hum.”

You can be attached to a point of view and let everyone know what it is, attached to an old worthless car, attached to new electronic devices. Attachments also manifest as control or letting others make decisions, never changing or always wanting something new, hurling anger or cringing. Some people only wear one style, some have vast collections of objects, and many are attached to getting their own way.

High-pitched or repetitive attachment binds deeply when it appears as tension, murkiness, yearning, obsession—any form of grasping that is so familiar it becomes part of your being. You know you should cut back on caffeine but you are compelled to drink another coffee. You’ve vowed to walk more often but you want to relax when you get home. You’ve been unhappy at work and should try to find another job but you can’t seem to make a move.

Roche says, “Attention always wants to finish what was unfinished.” If you are haunted by not taking the next step, asking yourself questions can release some of these internal knots.

CONTEMPLATION: WHAT IS MY ATTACHMENT

If you’d like, take a moment right now to ask yourself if you have an attachment you wish you didn’t have. You might know one right away. Lots of attachments may arise, such as being attached to certain foods, ways things should be done, irritation at interruption, or quiet time at the end of the day. If you feel

a darkness or fear you may recognise that something needs a closer look but you don’t know what or how. Over the course of the next week, contemplate your attachments. Ask yourself again and again until you get a better idea of what they are and whether you want a change.

ATTACHMENT TO POSITIVE FEELING

At first glance, attachment appears to be about objects, whether a car or house, furniture or clothes. The *Bhagavad Gita* says, “When you keep thinking about sense-objects

attachment comes. Attachment breeds desire, the lust of possession which, when thwarted, burns to anger. Anger clouds the judgment and robs you of the power to learn from past mistakes. Lost is the discriminative faculty and your life is utter waste.”

Pretty strong advice when you just want to update your phone or buy a kitchen appliance. But attachment to objects can cloud your life, especially when you don’t even know what you have or how to pay for them. The brilliant Japanese organiser Marie Kondo writes about attachment and objects. She says, “The best way to choose what to keep and what to throw away is to take each item in

one’s hand and ask, ‘Does this spark joy?’ If it does, keep it. If not, dispose of it. This is not only the simplest but also the most accurate yardstick by which to judge.”

This approach also works well for investigating attachments to people and situations. Good feelings are grounding and many attachments are based on generating and returning to positive feeling. Friendship, relationship, accomplishment, and confidence all rely on a foundation of good feeling. Whether you pick up a treasured vase or attend a favourite

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group, you reinforce your attraction to the positive.

Attachment gets sticky when it’s time to let go. Possibly you realize your attachment is not healthy physically, emotionally, or financially. Your mind clutches and your heart laments a loss. You can feel trapped, unable to change your point of view. Marie Kondo says, “When we really delve into the reasons for why we can’t let something go, there are only two: an attachment to the past or a fear for the future.”

YOUR PAST CREATED YOU

The most obvious attachment to the past is you. Everything that has come before has influenced what you look like, how you dress, what your

experiences have been, your opinions, dislikes, and sense of humour. You have created yourself and your concept of yourself, or your identity.

Have you ever resisted trying to change your own identity? Wear something that's not your colour or style, listen to music that's not in your taste, take action rather than step back? It challenges you. Who you think you are is entwined with your values, such as being spontaneous, trustworthy, generous, reckless, or vengeful. Surprisingly we're even attached to the

things about ourselves we would like to change.

Over time your mind becomes attached to your identity and reinforces it with a repetition of thoughts. These can be, "Once again I'm being taken advantage of." "What if there's not enough money?" "He'll get arrested." "I'm being judged." "I feel guilty." "I knew I was right."

Each of us has developed behaviours that often are more readily recognised in other people. These include being busy or in a hurry, task-oriented, checking messages, or running late.

Some people are blunt and others are diplomatic. Some impatient and some willing to wait. All of these are forms of attachment.

CONTEMPLATION ON DISAPPOINTMENT

One way to discover your own patterns of attachment is to notice what you are thinking when you don't get what you want. An item isn't available in your size, there's disagreement at work, discord at home. Are you self-critical? Do you think you should have done

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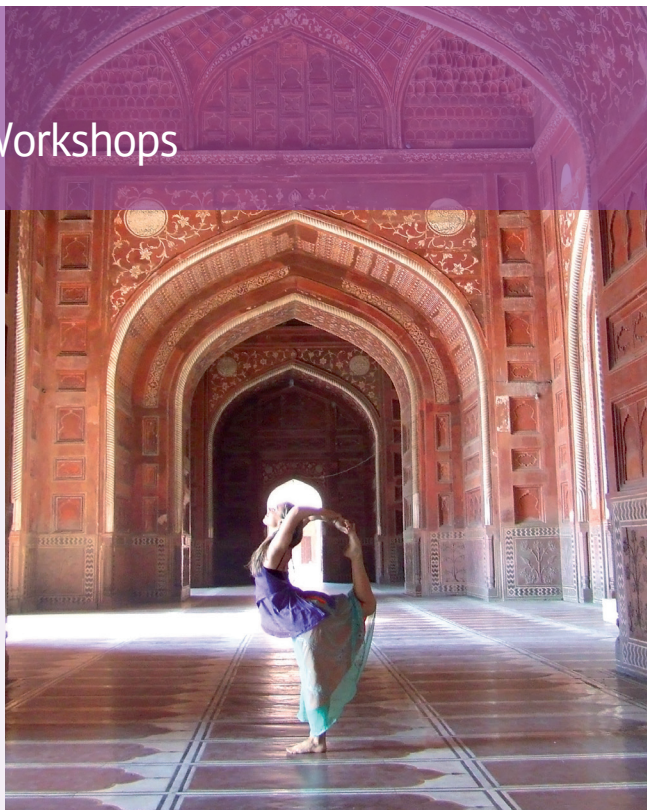
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something better or it's someone else's fault? Can you recognize patterns of thinking? These, too, are attachments.

GOOD FEELING BEYOND FEAR

The classic text *Yoga Vasishtha* says, "Attachment makes the conditioning of the mind more and more dense by repeatedly causing the experience of pleasure and pain."

Pleasure and pain are easy choices when it's clear, such as the pleasure of something delicious or the pain of burning your finger. Oddly enough, fear for the future is a strong attachment that can be a debilitating habit. Illness, death, moving, children leaving home, or a new job all can create fear.

Do you habitually return to fear or worry? The more your mind repeats fear, the more it forges a track and becomes dense, or palpable. Can you recognise fear of doing the wrong thing or fear of being exposed as manipulative, inadequate, being a fraud, or not being as generous (kind, sympathetic, etc.) as you act. What about fear that something unpleasant could happen again, or fear of losing control. As soon as one situation is resolved, the mind creates another fear.

When you name your fear you already have power over it. You have released a specific hold from your subconscious. Ask yourself, "How valid is this fear?" "Is this a familiar fear?" "How often do I lapse into this fear?" And recognise your pattern of thinking. "I am afraid of loss." "I am afraid of making the

wrong decision." "I fear things will get worse."

Can you notice the tension that arises when you think about your fear? You are scaring yourself by your own thoughts. In addition, you generate an internal battle between your natural state of calm and the turmoil of fear. Rather than struggling with

Letting go can be scary, so start small if you need to. You can have a small or significant shift of energy when you let

feelings you don't want, focus instead on feelings you do want.

The next level of inquiry is to find the good feeling behind your attachment. Ask yourself, "What am I holding on to?" For example, if you have fear of change, are you holding onto a sense of familiarity? If you have fear of loss, do you imagine you'll lose a heart connection? Ask yourself, "What do I get out of it?" "What good feeling do I associate in this attachment?" Some positive attributes may include:

Continuity—routine, continuing a job, relationship, place to live, even the same holiday every year

Security and safety—having enough money, being safe in friendship or family, feeling protected in your

environment

Familiarity—what you're accustomed to, feeling at ease, greeting the same people, being noticed

Love and fondness—heart connections in person and in memory, not having to prove yourself, acceptance

Adventure, excitement, challenge—sparking your enthusiasm, being creative, embracing opportunities

Involvement—being part of a group, recognized, useful, included, wanted, appreciated

CONTEMPLATION ON GOOD FEELING

You can bring the positive feeling with you when you have suffered a loss or been challenged by change. Take some time to discover what feelings support you the most. For example, "I want to feel clear and light." "I want excitement." "I can be most productive when my life is steady." Every time you respond towards what you want you are emphasizing and creating your bigger picture.

THE INTERNAL UNKNOWN

Attachment can be a clash of will. There's a place where you hold on. You know the clutching or craving is not good for you but you can't let go. Or you distract yourself so you don't get to the truth. You may get irritated or edgy. Maybe you simply don't know what is going on at your innermost level. Investigation into attachment

helps you become clear about something in your subconscious.

One technique is to speak about your attachment. “I want to stay in my house, my job, my relationship, this town, etc. because...” You may discover you are attached to things you don’t really want, or you would prefer were different.

CONTEMPLATION ON REVEALING THE TRUTH

Can you find the place of being stuck or in shadow? You can have a sense of cloudiness or an impediment. As you hold on internally you might notice physical tightness in your hands or shoulders. Sometimes you can be nauseous or find it hard to speak. Be gentle with yourself as you encourage the truth to reveal itself. Give yourself time. You don’t need to make a list of what you want to fix. Stay in the moment as feeling arises.

- **Clarify an intention.** Unsettled feelings are hard to pin down. The more precise you can be, the easier it is to dissolve troublesome attachments. During the day, when you have a moment to relax and reflect, or if you are a meditator, allow your concern to rise. Name your attachment. Let’s say you want to stop yourself from worrying or pass on a treat, maybe start to attend yoga more regularly, hold your tongue when you want to jump in, or flow with traffic without getting irritable. Say

your goal out loud. “I would like to . . .”

- **Take only one step.** To remove yourself from attachment takes one step at a time. What is your next step? “The next time I will act the way I want to, not the way that is my habit.” You may or may not succeed right away. Again, the next step is still only step one, not step two. Sri Aurobindo, a world-renowned yogi of the twentieth century, warns us that it is not easy. He says, “Even as the right attitude grows, wrong movements can arise.” These wrong movements are ingrained patterns that are very hard to reprogram. Step one, and again, step one, until you have acted in a different way. How does that feel?
- **Let go.** Letting go can be scary, so start small if you need to. You can have a small or significant shift of energy when you let go. For some people, clearing out clothes that are old or never worn opens space and releases energy. Sometimes letting go can be instantaneous and sometimes it takes a long time.
- **Open to new.** It’s an old cliché that when one door closes another one opens. In the same way, your entire being vibrates with positive change when you release an attachment that no longer serves you. Something you’ve never even considered may be ready when you are open

to receiving.

THE DEEPEST ATTACHMENT

The strongest attachment is attachment to who we are as a person. For each of us there will be a time of death of the body. The great texts of yoga point towards the spirit within. Focusing on inner silence and strength brings steadiness and clarity in everyday life, and the ability to face challenges and obstacles with grace. The *Bhagavad Gita* says, “Free from the ‘I’ and ‘mine,’ from aggression, arrogance, greed, desire, and anger, you are fit for the state of absolute freedom.”

Senior feature writer for AYL, Nancy Jackson (Swami Dayananda) has practiced meditation and yoga for more than 40 years. She is the author of *Yoga Life: Understanding Your Thought and Emotions and 108 Meditations*. She can be contacted through info@meditationyoga.com.au