

# Happiness Lies Within!

## Discovering Contentment to Enhance Occupational Performance for a Balanced Life

*By Mandy Lubas, OTR/L, RYT*

*Originally posted on Advance Magazine on May 4, 2015*

Contentment has been a big struggle for me, and I'm sure for most of you. I wanted to explore this topic and invite any insight with a comment at the end of the article.

This topic will be explored and discussed in two different articles. The first will explain Santosha and how it's used in the OT scope of practice. The second article will share a personal interview with a history teacher who has practiced Santosha by moving to Durham, N.H. to live in a 125-square-foot home in order to simplify his life. The sharing of these personal outcomes will help you incorporate tools and strategies into your OT scope of practice to facilitate everlasting change in the lives of your clients.

From my own personal experiences, I've become imbalanced in my life because my mindset is to push. According to Ayurveda (the sister science of yoga), this is a Pitta body constitution. I've generated disease within myself, and luckily I caught it at an early stage to avoid issues in my tissues, where disease cannot be reversed.

I've always felt that if I ease my way through life, I am a "slacker" because I am not constantly running after my goals and desires. To most of us, this is a reasonable mindset, because it does take determination, networking, time, energy, and motivation to construct our lives and make the changes we need to impact the good of all concerned.

My intent for writing this article is to bring awareness to the OT community regarding ways to enhance occupational performance for ourselves and the lives of others.

Through my own work in developing contentment, I've been able to share experiences, draw from insights, and share strategies to discover ways to slow down to experience life to its fullest. I will draw upon an experiential interview with a schoolteacher who found contentment by simplifying his life by living in a 125-square-foot custom home on wheels in Durham, N.H. (This interview will be the sequel to this article).

Yoga has been a gift for me, and there is absolutely no turning back. In classical yoga, there was a great ancient Vedic sage named Pantanjali. He set the goal of yoga to be of total freedom from suffering. How is this possible? Pantanjali set forth an intention and created the eight limbs of yoga. Each limb helps us shift our internal drishti (internal reference point) from constriction to expansiveness. As one can shift or be aware of the

"ego" state, an individual becomes more conscious or more aware. Simply speaking, they become the "witness" of their "self."

This article will revisit the second limb of yoga, called Santosha, to integrate this Niyama into human occupation to live a meaningful and purposeful life.

### **Revisiting the 8 Limbs of Yoga**

"A Catalyst for Health and Well-Being" was a 2013 column I wrote for *ADVANCE* regarding yoga therapy in the scope of practice for OT. Yoga is a science that dates back 5,000 years, and is becoming more mainstream in the United States. Millions of people are practicing yoga around the world in studios, gyms, health and wellness centers, integrative medical practices, places of employment, and the comfort of their own homes. Individuals of all ages look toward yoga for stress relief, reduction of pain, to heal a medical condition, for a spiritual awakening, or even for a workout to develop strength, endurance, flexibility, and balance.

Yoga for me is not just practicing asana (yoga poses on the mat), but practicing all of the limbs. There are eight of them, and they can be viewed in the article mentioned above. Niyama is the second limb, which is the topic of this article, focusing on the quality of contentment. Sanskrit is the ancient language of India, and the word for contentment is Santosha. Simplicity and contentment are interchanged in this article. The Sanskrit word for simplicity is saralata. It is the prerequisite to experiencing peace. Santosha is accepting what happens. Simply accepting whatever life has to offer and learning from it. It is also accepting ourselves just as we are.

Niyama means positive duties or observances. They are recommended activities and habits for healthy living. Niyamas are about cultivating self-acceptance and being at ease of what is. It's important not to get into a rigid state of thinking that there is a right or wrong way to think from our conditioned upbringing within our own family systems, however that looks for you. Anything can be rewired, especially your thinking patterns. The mind has an amazing way of keeping us hostage from our "true self." Mind chatter can be painful, and can be compared to an individual with severe auditory defensiveness in a loud room, or someone with schizophrenia.

### **Santosha's Qualities**

According to yoga philosophy, five main qualities emerge as a result of living an authentic and balanced life. One I want to bring to your attention is Santosha, which means contentment. According to the OT Domain Scope of Practice, "Occupations are centered to a client's (person's, group's, or population's) identity and sense of competence, and have particular meaning and value to that individual. When a person engages in purposeful activities out of personal choice and they are valued, these clusters of purposeful activities form occupations. Thus, occupations are unique to each

individual and provide personal satisfaction and fulfillment as a result of engaging in them."

How many times do these thoughts wonder in and out of your mind? "I just want to take the time to sit and do nothing," or "When I get organized I will be able to breathe," or "A vacation is well needed but there is no time." Our lives are hectic, with upsets secondary to the curveballs in life. We struggle to find balance in all areas of occupation.

But why? There's drama at work, challenges in our relationships, deadlines to be met, bills to pay, money to be made, a family to be raised, loved ones to be cared for, searching for happiness in the external world, feeling overwhelmed starting up a holistic OT business, or even having overwhelmed thoughts of how to find ways to simplify our lives. But the funny thing is, we create our own havoc. Life can be simple, but it is the issue of thinking we need to have it all. We want instant gratification in having the ideal house, being in a relationship that we dreamed of, the perfect job, a fit body, eating all organic, even searching for enlightenment or a teacher to put us on that perfect path. We spend so much time striving, searching, and reaching, when in fact we have it all right now! However, most of us are dissatisfied, frustrated, or impatient, because our minds tell us otherwise. The mind will trick us into thinking that our expectations are actually achievable with a blink of an eye. Not so. Trust, faith, courage, love, truth, and wisdom will get us there through our daily experiences of boons and triumphs. This is called Inner Balance.

### **Inner Balance to Create Goals**

Helen Palmer is author of *The Enneagram*, and she describes contentment as balance: "being able to stabilize attention in the present and feeling the satisfaction of having enough." To me, it is an inner feeling over everything slowing down, where I am able to experience clarity. With this experience, chaotic situations that happen in the outer world do not impact my inner world. I am able to remain steady.

But what is so unappealing about contentment? Are we afraid that we will become bored if content, and that nothing interesting will happen in our lives? I know that when I become bored, I "freak out," needing to fill my day with busyness to avoid sitting still.

I'm learning that this is a misconception. Actually by being content, life gets more interesting. Life is viewed very differently, and we can see all the abundance that we have by just keeping life simple. Our nervous system slows down. Contentment heightens our appreciation and experience of what is, and strengthens us on many levels. We have less of a need to "want" and enjoy what we "have," making us happier with who we are.

As OTs, how can we make peace with Santosha?

## **Goals Without Attachment**

The problem is, when we have things in mind that we want to achieve, possess, or change, there is a tendency to have expectations. And you know the old saying -- "expectations lead to disappointment." Sure, it would be great to have a new job. But if we're expecting to get a certain one, and that doesn't happen, what happens to our inner peace? It can be devastating. It's great to have the idea of being healthier, but if we want our bodies to look like someone else's, and it doesn't come about, how do we end up feeling? Comparison and attachment to outcome turn the good intentions of having goals for ourselves into feelings of failure and inadequacy.

When we're content, it doesn't mean to give up striving for something meaningful. The difference is that when we're in a state of Santosha, we're unattached to the results, and there's no comparison to anyone or anything else. We retain our inner balance when a relationship doesn't work out. We may grieve, but we feel grateful for the experience and open to what the universe has in store next. With any undertaking, we do our best and leave the results up to the universe, trusting that some good comes out of it.

## **Being Content ≠ Complacent**

Contentment isn't complacency. Feeling Santosha feeds our confidence by cultivating a sense of inner well-being. From that confident and calm state, we're more likely to step into new challenges, and more apt to be successful at them. When we're in a state of balance and generally satisfied with ourselves and our lives, we enjoy more of whatever life offers. We can still go on great adventures, but we can find that by hiking, sailing, surfing, and even sitting in a hot tub, one can be content too. We can become open to outcome, rather than fixed on one particular result. Contentment actually opens us up to explore and experience more in life. Everything is a stepping stone, and we build from one step at a time.

## **How to Exercise Santosha in an OT Session**

As a holistic occupational therapist, I gather background information on my client's health and well-being through questionnaires. These particular questionnaires are listed below. I've also made recommendations for possible suggestions to try in treatment to discover opportunities to discover glimpses of Santosha.

1. Happiness Scale
2. Anxiety Rating Scale
3. Quality of Life Rating Scale

4. Depression Scale

5. Ayurvedic Body Constitution Questionnaire (learning about body constitution to discover imbalances that a client may be unaware of)

### **Treatment Ideas to Explore Simplicity (Saralata)**

1. Explore ways to develop a Satsang group (community of like-minded people) for our clients to share their struggles, regain their autonomy, and reach their goals by being witnessed amongst others.

2. A 21-day present moment exploration (take 30 minutes out of the day to use a taught strategy to remain in the present moment). It takes 21 days to break a habit and re-wire.

3. Gratitude journal.

4. Introduce yoga poses to help ground a client (mostly standing poses).

5. Discover through strategic planning what is needed to fulfill a client's basic needs in order to establish simplicity (i.e. financial obligations vs. wants and needs).

In conclusion, we all want to be content in life. However, it seems as if we need to be reminded and rewired on how to get back there. According to the article "Don't Indulge, Be Happy" by Elizabeth W. Dunn in the *New York Times* (July 7, 2012), an individual needs a salary of \$75,000 to live happily. Anything more makes one work hard, play less, and hinder their health and well-being, impacting overall occupational performance.

The question is, are you ready to simplify or saralata for longevity?

*Mandy Lubas is a holistic occupational therapist certified in sensory integration, RYT, AWC, and Certified Panchakarma Technician, who has been in the field of medicine for 13 years. She treats individuals in homes, schools, the community, outpatient clinics, a studio called Ananda Shanti Yoga and Wellness Center, and an integrative medical practice called Well Life Medical, where she combines traditional medicine with Yoga and Ayurveda. Mandy is a graduate of Quinnipiac University, Kerala Ayurveda Academy, and Yogaspirits® 200, 800, and 1000-hour teacher training programs, and is currently working toward her certification in Craniosacral Therapy. She can be contacted at [bonjourmm@yahoo.com](mailto:bonjourmm@yahoo.com) or [www.holistictherapies4life.com](http://www.holistictherapies4life.com).*