

The Four Keys

Written by Shelley Lowther

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The first time I read the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, I was struck by the similarity of the sutras and the Beatitudes. As the nuns taught me growing up, the eight Beatitudes of Jesus provide a way of life that promises salvation, but also provide peace and help us to survive the trials and tribulations we must face here on earth. Each sutra, or thread, contained a shred of wisdom, that if put into action, could bring the practitioner inner peace and happiness.

These aphorisms, be they Sutras or Beatitudes, offer short snippets of advice on how to live better while on this planet, and how to be in service to others.

One of the most striking Sutras to me was always 1.33, often referred to colloquially as the Four Locks and Keys. This Sutra suggests that there are only four locks in the world (sukha, duhka, punya and apunya) and that if you keep with you the four keys (kindness, compassion, honor and indifference), you will be able to keep a open heart and a calm mind. To use those four keys, we should cultivate the following attitudes: **Kindness** to the sukha, those who are fortunate or happy; **Compassion** for the duhka, unfortunate, or unhappy; **honor** and delight for punya, the virtuous; and **indifference** to the apunya, the wicked.

Patanjali suggests that the most used key is the happiness key, because it is very easy to covet someone's happiness. It is easy to get eaten up with jealousy or our own duhka when we see

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someone happy, so it is important to use this key when encountering a happy person. If we are not happy for someone else's good fortune, we rob ourselves of happiness.

We should use the compassion key when we encounter unhappiness because if we can help another being, then we should do so. Offering compassion is what helps keep us peaceful; the person suffering may or may not accept it, but it is the offering that matters.

The third key is in honoring virtue – when we see virtue in others we should honor it and attempt to cultivate it in our own lives. Refusing to honor virtue leads to *duhka*, or unhappiness, in our own lives and locks yet more doors.

Last, but not least, is equanimity or indifference to the wicked. This does not mean we watch evil go untethered, but rather that we do not feed it. Towards evil, we practice peace. As Patanjali warns, if you try to advise the wicked, you are wasting your time. Instead, practice indifference to the wicked and honor the virtuous, and the scales will balance themselves.

Patanjali suggests that if we keep the four keys in our pocket, and we recognize the four locks as they appear in our lives, then we will be presented with calm and inner peace.

Jesus presented a very similar idea in the Sermon on the Mount when he gave Christians the Beatitudes in the Gospel of Saint Matthew. The Biblical scriptures also suggest using friendliness and compassion to combat not only the ills of the world, but also to keep ourselves pure. Jesus said:

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

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- Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.
- Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
- Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.
- Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
- Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

As a yogi, the Beatitudes and Sutra 1.33 sum things up nicely. Practicing compassion, towards myself and towards others, has been one of the most heartfelt and life-changing lessons I have ever learned. When I treat myself with compassion, I can treat others with compassion. When I am truly happy for the success and good fortune of others, I can share and celebrate in their happiness. If I fall into the easy habit of envy or jealousy towards another's happiness, I actually compromise my own happiness and my own peace.

Again, it is easy to fall into the pattern of unhappiness or dis-ease when faced with unhappiness. As the saying goes, misery loves company. That is why, when faced with the unhappiness and misery of others, we should practice compassion and do what we can to help (as Jesus would say, give alms) rather than get pulled down into the mire.

It is also easy to become jealous and scornful of Patanjali's "virtuous," whom Jesus refers to as the "righteous." Instead of treating these people with scorn, they should be treated with reverence. Not placed on a pedestal, but rather admired for the good deeds, and when possible emulated. As yogis, to me these means being of service to others when you are inspired by service.

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As for the wicked, I think the Bible and the Sutras are in agreement again. Leave them be, for they have nothing to offer. Those who persecute or look down on those who live in service should not be regarded at all.

The yogi in me thinks of B.K.S. Iyengar: “Before we can find peace among nations, we have to find peace within the tiny nation that is ourselves.” If we apply the teachings of Patanjali here, everything comes full circle. To the poor in spirit and to those who mourn, we practice compassion. To those who are meek, we practice friendliness, and kindness. To those who are righteous and merciful, we practice honor. To the clean of heart, friendliness. To the peace makers, honor. To the persecuted, compassion.

Though they lived thousands of years apart, I feel like Jesus and Patanjali would have been agreed – the key to happiness in the human condition is in how we treat one another. Of all the sutras, Biblical or spiritual teachings in the world, there is one lesson above all that comes to mind:

Do unto others.

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