

[Life Lessons](#)

3 ways to stop sweating the small stuff

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By **Mitra Malek** | December 3, 2019

Daily living serves up plenty of annoyances: bad weather, barking dogs, red lights, cold coffee. It's hard to find the sweet spot. And even when we do, another annoyance pops up.

Life wasn't designed to coddle, but it sure doesn't stop us from thinking it should.

An indisputable mark of existence is suffering. It's a Buddhist concept called [dukkha](#) (or *duhkha* in Sanskrit), and it happens large and small. We feed it by continually being dissatisfied with "the reality of the human condition, with the fact that pleasant and unpleasant situations are part and parcel of life," the Buddhist nun Pema Chodron [points out](#) in one of her many books that deliver Buddhist teachings in ways that make sense of all the normal (and wacko) stuff we do.

As the winter holidays round the corner, so do prime-time flare-ups, thanks to the extra stress the season packs on. Here are 3 strategies to help you go with the flow:

1. Turn your "why?" into "why not?"

Why is this guy driving so slowly? Why is it noisy in here? Why is Hanukkah filled with food I don't like? Bet you can think of dozens more little irritants. I sure can. Now rephrase your rhetorical queries to the good-mood gods, and then consider prevailing circumstances. Why shouldn't it be noisy in

here? Are you in a crowded store, shopping for Christmas gifts along with other busy and overwhelmed people? It would be kind of Twilight Zone-ish for it not to be noisy. And even if you're in a library, fact is, you can't control everything. So: It's noisy in there.

2. Get curious about your thoughts and feelings.

Stick with your gripe. Then experiment. Notice how you're building a storyline around the grievance. What if your storyline is wrong? Maybe the driver moving at a glacial pace isn't self-absorbed. Maybe he's reeling from really bad news, and for the good of everyone, he's taking it slow so he can better focus on the road.

Better yet, what if you avoid a storyline and instead simply notice what's going on — and then see how long it takes for the irritant to pass, whether on its own or because of action you take. This reminds you of the ups and downs Pema Chodron refers to. You have power over whether to indulge the darn dukkha.

3. Go somewhere grand.

Seek out someplace beautiful: a park, a mountain, an impeccably decorated indoor space. It's tough to get worked up over a gift costing more than you think it should when you buy it after a gorgeous hike or a tour of somewhere so pretty you keep thinking about it.

A longtime yoga teacher and former senior editor and current contributing editor for Yoga Journal, Mitra Malek has discussed and dissected dukkha plenty. Still, she sweats the small stuff more than she'd like. Connect at www.mitramalek.com.

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