



## A little philosophy...

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ABOUT THE YAMAS AND NIYAMAS: In Patanjali's "Eight-fold Path" the Yamas and Niyamas are the first points of entry into the study of yoga—even before the asanas (poses). They encourage a greater sense of social and personal responsibility and are a useful tool for self-examination. This is a very brief contemporary interpretation...

## YAMAS

### FIVE VIRTUES OR RESTRAINTS CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL FOR HAPPINESS IN SOCIETY.

#### **AHIMSA -: Non-violence**

Aim to cause no harm to any living thing by thought, word or deed. Avoid mental viciousness/aggression, abusive language (even in thought). Think about your actions and their potential to cause harm, not just to yourself and other people but animals, plants, the environment. Vegetarianism is an extension of this precept. In asana (yoga pose) practice, strive for equal amounts of effort and ease in every posture.

#### **SATYA -: Truthfulness**

Remember Ahimsa (non-harming) when practising Satya. There is a notion that there are 3 levels of truth: truth in our daily lives, our internal truth (integrity) and universal truth. The first refers to what we see, feel, and need. Judith Lasater says: "All lies, even 'white lies' or lies of convenience separate us from ourselves and others." Integrity is about telling the truth even when no-one would ever know otherwise. The third is a much broader concept of trying to connect your awareness to the greater truths of Life. In your physical practice, strive for honesty. Cultivate honour and integrity rather than righteousness. Be true to your 'deeper' self.

#### **ASTEYA -: Non-stealing/non-covetousness**

Desires of any sort 'muddy the stream of tranquility'. In yoga one of our goals is to minimise our cravings, for it is those cravings that make us miserable. To paraphrase BKS Iyengar: "The yogi reduces his needs to a minimum, believing that if he gathers things he does not really need, he is a thief." Asteya covers not just the physical act of stealing but also notions of 'stealing' other people's time, knowledge, glory, 'thunder', happiness, security and confidence. In a yoga class, avoid looking enviously at other people's poses.

#### **BRAHMACHARYA -: Contenance/restraint**

Traditionally, a serious yoga practitioner would observe the practice of celibacy. In modern terms, Brahmacharya refers to 'moderation' in all things. It is recommended that we use our body/mind energies wisely so that we can develop a store of vitality to help us cope with the challenges of life. Always in asana practice, endeavour to find the poses that are appropriate for you. It is said that yoga (body/mind union) will not be found by he/she who eats too much or too little, does too much or too little...Find the middle path.

#### **APARIGRAHA -: Non-hoarding**

Hoarding or collecting things (or knowledge) for their own sake complicates our lives. Our materialistic society makes this precept very challenging to follow. Can you strive to work for what you have, make your 'collection' worthwhile and share what you have willingly with others? Try not to hoard emotional experiences or information. Avoid treating asanas (poses) as a collection of accomplishments.



# NIYAMAS

## FIVE GUIDELINES FOR INDIVIDUAL DISCIPLINE AND DEVELOPMENT

### **SAUCHA -:** Purity/cleanliness

The practice of Saucha includes being aware of the origins of the food we eat, the cleanliness of the place in which we live and work as well as 'treading lightly on the earth'. In addition to this, Saucha refers to freeing ourselves of disturbing emotions. Regular asana practice encourages the natural cleansing processes of body. Regular meditation does the same for the mind.

### **SANTOSA -:** Contentment

This is about accepting our decisions and the choices that have led us to where we are. It is not a resignation to fate or oppression, but rather about not blaming others for our own circumstance. When we cease to blame external forces and events, we can make changes in our lives with a sense of inner-peace. It also refers to finding a sense of acceptance of the highs and lows of life, or happiness and sadness, activity and stillness. Practicing yoga poses will, over a period of time, enable a practitioner to understand their strengths and weaknesses, their potential and their limitations—ultimately resulting in self-acceptance.

### **TAPAS -:** Effort

For some, tapas comes more naturally than others. It is a drive, a 'fire in the belly', that urges us to develop ourselves, to be conscious of our own development and to never give up. Without Tapas, people stagnate, avoid challenges, and seek the easy path. Much is learned by taking the 'road less travelled' and seeking new personal challenges. Be brave in personal relationships. Live with an open-heart. Don't settle into complacency. In asana practice, try not to shy away from uncomfortable and demanding poses.

### **SVADHYAYA -:** Self-education

Through Svadhyaya we attempt to gain insight into our personality, our habits, our nature and the way in which we have structured our lives. Svadhyaya is a commitment to learning more, not just about ourselves but also the world in which we live. With this niyama we can examine and then root out the negative aspects of ourselves and make profound changes to the way in which we live. Through Svadhyaya we can discover our deep motivations and be open to our true destiny in life. For most practitioners, regular yoga sessions (private or group settings) quickly become fertile ground for self-discovery. Let your resistance and ease in asanas teach you about yourself.

### **ISVARA PRANIDHANA -:** Respect for the Divine in all things

As a strong connection develops between the body, mind and spirit, the yoga practitioner may find a deeper connection with all living things. The awareness of 'interconnectedness' can develop into a profound respect and a sense of the 'divine' in all things. Isvara Pranidhana provides room for an individual's religious beliefs to be recognised. It is ultimately about leading a less ego-centric life.

