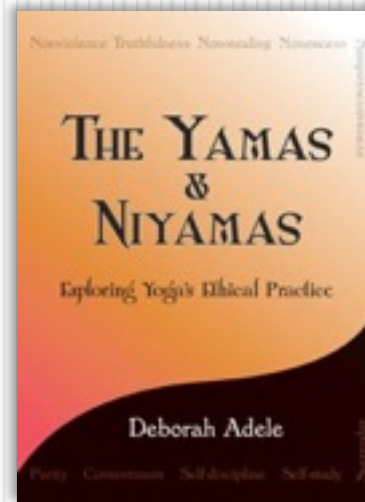




YAMAS & NIYAMAS

Exploring Yoga's Ethical Practice



Yoga is a journey of creating harmony in one's life and letting go of the blocks that keep us from this harmony. In the process, we discover a deeper reality of being, a place of contentment, wisdom, and joy.

The Eight Limbs of Classical Yoga

1. *Yamas* – right living with others
2. *Niyamas* – right living with our inner minds and thoughts
3. *Asana* (postures) – right living with our body
4. *Pranayama* – right use of our energy
5. *Pratyahara* – right use of our senses
6. *Dharana* – concentration
7. *Dhyana* – meditation
8. *Samadhi* – unity or the experience of connection

Yamas Translates as “Restrains”

An adult relationship with all sentient beings

Seeking social harmony through:

- *Ahimsa* – Nonviolence
- *Satya* – Truthfulness
- *Asteya* – Nonstealing
- *Brahmacharya* – Nonexcess
- *Aparigraha* – Nonpossessiveness

Niyamas Translates as “Not Restraints” or “Observances”

An adult relationship with ones mind and thoughts

Seeking internal and personal harmony through:

- *Saucha* – Purity
- *Santoshā* – Contentment
- *Tapas* – Self-Discipline
- *Svādhyāya* – Self-Study
- *Ishvara Pranidhana* - Surrender

Ahimsa -Nonviolence अहिंसा

Nonviolence is refraining from acts of violence, harm and unkindness to others, to the earth, and to oneself.

Practices for nonviolence:

- Create balance in your life
- Face your fears
- Practice courage
- Cultivate kindness and compassion to the world, others, and yourself

For reflection:

“How we treat ourselves is in truth how we treat those around us.”

What is happening in you when you are unkind or violent?

Satya - Truthfulness

सत्य

Truthfulness is refraining from lying with an additional emphasis on being more authentic and more real.

As a partner to nonviolence, truthfulness prevents nonviolence from being a wimpy cop-out and nonviolence prevents truthfulness from being a brutal weapon.

Practices for truthfulness:

- Be real rather than nice
- Tell yourself the truth
- Truth changes – get and stay current with yourself

For reflection:

“Truth rarely seems to ask the easier choice of us.”

In what ways are you living an inauthentic life?

Asteya - Nonstealing

अस्तेय

Nonstealing is refraining from taking what isn't yours and refraining from taking more than you need.

Practices for nonstealing:

- Refrain from stealing from the earth
- Refrain from stealing from the future
- Refrain from stealing from others
- Refrain from stealing from yourself
- Practice reciprocity with all things
- Become excited about what you do have in
 - material goods
 - relationships
 - your own unique gifts and talents
 - the gift of life itself

For reflection:

“When we are engaged in the joy and challenge of creating ourselves, we automatically serve the world rather than steal from it.”

Where are you stealing in order to feel better about yourself?

Brahmacharya - Nonexcess (ब्रह्मचर्य)

Nonexcess is refraining from overindulgence with food, sleep, pleasure, and work. It is cultivating a sense of sacredness in all that you do.

Practices for nonexcess:

- Learn to tell when the nourishment of enough turns into the dullness of excess
- Separate what the body really needs from the extravagant message the mind is telling you about these needs
- Live your passion
- Honor all things as sacred
- Honor yourself as sacred

For reflection:

“When gratitude and wonder sit in the heart, there is no need for excess.”
Where is dullness keeping you from the full expression of your life?

Aparigraha - Nonpossessiveness अपरिग्रह

Nonpossessiveness is refraining from possessing, grasping, or clinging to any person, event, or thing.

Practices for nonpossessiveness:

- Let the breath teach you: if you don't fully let go of the exhalation, the full nourishment of the inhalation is not available. Holding on is a toxic action.
- Fully enjoy each thing without needing it to repeat itself.
- Live with curiosity, not expectations
- Let go of control and be willing to be surprised
- Practice generosity and trust

For reflection:

"Anything we cling to creates a maintenance problem for us."

In what way has your need to possess created a prison for you?

Review of the Yamas

- are not pat, simple answers
- they are guides to move in the direction of harmony
- they require familiarity and daily practice

The practice of:

- *Nonviolence* guides us from harming ourselves and others to kindness and compassion for self and others.
- *Truthfulness* guides us from lies and half-truths to expressing our uniqueness and authenticity.
- *Nonstealing* guides us from theft to cultivating new skills and abilities.
- *Nonexcess* guides us from greed to appreciation and pleasure without excess.
- *Nonpossessiveness* guides us from attachment to intimacy without possession.

Saucha –Purity

शौच

Purity is the active pursuit of letting go.

- It invites us to purify our bodies, our thoughts, and our words
- It invites us to be purely available to each moment as it happens

Practices for purity:

- Lighten your “load” wherever it is.
 - Physical weight
 - Mental clutter
 - Emotional rigidity
 - Messy living space
- Allow things to be as they are, not as you wish they were
 - Be pure “with” something; don’t try to “make” it pure
 - Let go of judgments, expectations, opinions, disappointment
 - Keep from attempting to change yourself or hide from yourself
- Slow down
- Do one thing at a time

For reflection:

“Whatever form purifying takes, it always begins with an intention to ‘lighten’ the load we are carrying.”

Where is the heaviness in your life?

Santosha –Contentment संतोष

Contentment is the active practice of gratitude and appreciation for what is.

Practices for contentment:

- Look “inside” the fence, not over it.
- Avoid seeking what you “like” and avoiding what you “dislike”.
- Discontinue giving others power over your emotional status.
- Develop a still, calm center through meditation.
- Stay in gratitude

For reflection:

“Choose to stay established in contentment rather than tossed on the waves of the ups and downs of life.”

What pulls you out of contentment? What could you do to choose contentment instead?

Tapas -Self-Discipline

तपसू

(also “heat”, catharsis, austerities, spiritual effort, change, tolerance, transformation)

Self-discipline is effort towards a future value, in lieu of a momentary pleasure.

Practices for self-discipline:

- Make choices that support the “you” that you want to become
- Forsake momentary pleasures for future rewards.
 - Exercise
 - Food choices
 - Activities
 - Spiritual practice
- Choose to build character when times are tough
- Hold on for the blessing

For reflection:

“Tapas is the willingness to be both burned and blessed.”

Moment by moment, who are you choosing to become?

Svadhyaaya -Self-Study

Self-study is the intentional seeking to know who you are.

Practices for self-study:

- Notice your conditioning
- Notice your projections
- “Trace it back”
- Understand the role of the ego
- Develop your “witness”
- Read sacred texts of any tradition

स्वाध्याय

For reflection:

“We suffer, the yogis tell us, because we forget who we are.”

Name some of your beliefs, roles, characteristics, likes and dislikes.

When all of these are taken away, who are you?

Ishvara Pranidhana - सुईश्वर प्रणिधान

Surrender is actively putting ourselves at the feet of something greater than we are.

Practices for surrender:

- Participate in self-less service
- Give up trying to control, manipulate, and fight with life
- Find your faith and trust
- Pay attention to what life is teaching/telling you
- Get in touch with the feeling of expansion
- Be vulnerable, undefended, and available
- Care deeply about something other than yourself

For reflection:

“Surrender is ultimately a stance of devotion that takes place in the heart and permeates all of our attitudes and actions.”

What does your heart care about? Does this line up with your thoughts and actions?

Review of the Niyamas

- Are daily, proactive, practices
- Focus on our relationship with our self
- Change our character from the inside out

The practice of:

- *Purity* invites us to cleanse our bodies, our speech, our thoughts
- *Contentment* invites us to fall in love with our own life
- *Self-Discipline* invites us to consciously choose discipline and growth
- *Self-Study* invites us to know the self
- *Surrender* invites us to pay attention to what life is asking of us

Summary

Perfection of each Yama brings:

- Nonviolence – an aura of peace that protects self and other
- Truth – spoken words will always come true
- Nonstealing – abundance
- Nonexcess – great vitality
- Nonpossessiveness – knowledge of experience

Perfection of each Niyama brings:

- Purity – clarity
- Contentment – joy
- Self-discipline – refinement
- Self-study – freedom
- Surrender - harmony