

Yamas and Niyamas

Recommened Reading: The Yamas & Niyamas by Deborah Adele

Yamas and niyamas are ethical guidelines for living. Yamas are considered the "outer" observance. Niyamas are the "inner" observances - a guide for living soulfully. Patanjali teaches that there are 5 yamas and 5 niyamas Yamas (observances).

Ahimsa: Kindness, compassion for self and others, Non-violence, non-harming (do no harm, the avoidance of violence). Be mindful of how you treat others. You can apply this first to yourself in your physical yoga practice, then to your thoughts and actions, and continue to broaden it many other ways, to include all living beings. We can do harm to ourselves when we treat people and things with disrespect.

Satya: Truthfulness or honesty in thought, words and communication. Formulate your words before you speak them. As satya is achieved, the fruits of actions naturally result.

Asteya: Non-stealing, not taking that which you know is not yours. First reject the urge to take what is not yours, then work on changing the inner thoughts that lead to that urge.

Brahmacharya: Walking in awareness of the highest reality, remembering the divine. Also, sexual moderation, conservation of energy, in some cases abstinence and celibacy.

Aparigraha: Non-possessiveness, non-holding through senses, non-greed, non-grasping, non-indulgence, non-acquisitiveness, non-hoarding- generosity in spirit and action. Accept what you need for your Dharma and not anything else. Do not spend energy longing for what others have (jealously). Self responsibility (understanding that you have created your life), take action towards progress and connect with your sense of wholeness within... trust yourself and your life.

Niyamas (observances)

Saucha or shaucha: Purity or cleanliness. This is both internal and external. It's how we treat our bodies and our energies (internal) and how we treat our environment (external). Our surroundings reflect and influence ourselves- bring a clean and orderly dimension to your home and environment where you work and play.

Santosha: Contentment, willing to accept what is- that leads to gratitude. Be content with what you attain. Accept where you are. The quality of contentment leads to inner peace. We find that what we need is right here in the moment, no matter if this moment is easy or difficult.

Tapas: Discipline, training the senses, fire or heat. Centering in the awareness of your practice with both discipline and enthusiasm. Using the power of choice to overcome inertia or tamas. You might view it as a way to cleanse the mind and body of the daily residue that may color your perceptions.

Svadyaya: The study of one's self; careful self-observation; turning inward. In the pause after a pose (asana), ask yourself, "What's changed?". Build self-awareness. The focus is internal, self-knowledge. Allows you to avoid competing with others in the room and to prevent injuries. Be willing to see your self, to grow and to change. Read and connect with illuminating works and writers who can propel you to a new stream of consciousness.

Ishvara Pranidhana: Surrender to life. Live an expression of all these attitudes (niyamas). Celebrate your aliveness and surrender to it.