

YAMA AND NIYAMA

Yama and Niyama are the universal moral foundations of yoga — governing not just physical actions, but thoughts and intentions as well. Yama (“to regulate”) trains self-control in relation to others; Niyama (“observances”) deepens inner discipline and spiritual growth. A person who violates these principles cannot progress in meditation, no matter how long they sit. They are not restrictions — they are the conditions for a free and elevated mind.

YAMA

1. Ahimsa — Non-harming

Not inflicting pain or harm on anyone by thought, word, or action. This goes beyond physical violence — so long as the mind holds any intention to harm, spiritual development is blocked. The sadhaka minimizes the pain he causes to all living beings. A vegetarian diet is strongly recommended: more highly developed life forms should not be killed when vegetables are available.

Example: You feel irritated at a colleague and think of a cutting remark. Ahimsa means catching that thought before it becomes a word.

2. Satya — Benevolent Truthfulness

Guiding all thought, speech and action with the spirit of welfare. Satya is not blind truthfulness — stating a harsh truth with no regard for the other person's wellbeing is also a violation. A sadhaka speaks the truth as far as possible, always taking the welfare of others into account. Lying out of selfish intent must be shunned.

Example: A doctor softens a difficult diagnosis with compassion — this is Satya. Gossiping a true but harmful fact about someone is not.

3. Asteya — Non-stealing

Not taking possession of what belongs to others, physically or mentally, and not depriving others of their due. The thought of stealing is as reprehensible as the act itself. Asteya includes indirect theft — driving through a toll without paying, or taking credit for another's work. The tendency must be removed from the mind entirely.

Example: Using a colleague's idea in a meeting without crediting them is a violation of Asteya, even if nothing was physically taken.

4. Brahmacharya — Attachment to Brahma

Remaining attached to Brahma (Supreme Consciousness) and seeing all things one encounters as expressions of Brahma, not as crude material forms. This is the keystone of all Yama principles — one truly established in Brahmacharya will have no tendency to harm, lie, steal or over-indulge. It is the most difficult Yama but can be achieved through sincere spiritual practice.

Example: Instead of seeing an annoying person as an obstacle, you consciously recognize them as an expression of the same Cosmic Consciousness — this shifts the entire interaction.

NIYAMA

1. Shaoca — Purity

Purity and cleanliness, both physical and mental. As long as the mind engages in crude thoughts, selfish motives or worldly passions, it cannot reach lofty spiritual heights. The mind is continually affected by bodily and surrounding environments — hence regular bathing, clean dress and clean surroundings are part of Shaoca. But inner purity is primary.

Example: Practicing half-bath before meditation is Shaoca of the body. Letting go of a grudge before sitting to meditate is Shaoca of the mind. Mental pollution also includes consuming content that does not elevate the mind: scrolling social media, watching low-quality films and shows — all pull the mind downward.

2. Santosa — Contentment

A lasting state of mental ease and contentment. True contentment comes only when the mind is freed from external, mundane allurements. A stormy, craving mind will always be bound to lower strata. Santosa is not passivity — it is the balanced equilibrium needed to realize the infinite, unperturbed nature of Supreme Consciousness.

Example: Instead of feeling frustrated that you don't have a better phone, you cultivate gratitude for what you have — and find your mind becomes quieter in meditation.

3. Tapah — Selfless Service

Practicing penance through selfless service to those less fortunate than oneself. Mind influenced by individual ego cares only for its own benefit. The sadhaka overcomes this pettiness by serving others — the weaker, poorer, less educated. The one who is served is the Brahma; service rendered is the sadhaka's sadhana. Through Tapah, one selflessly develops devotion and love for the Supreme Consciousness.

Example: Volunteering to teach underprivileged children, or giving up personal comfort to help a sick neighbor — not for recognition, but as an offering to the Supreme Consciousness.

4. Svadhyaya — Self-study

Clear understanding of the underlying meaning of spiritual scripture and discourse through personal study and reflection. Without spiritual insight it is very difficult to comprehend what scriptures actually mean. The sadhaka must go beyond dogmatic or ritualistic interpretations. One should not accept blindly the words of others, however illumined, without personally penetrating deep into their meaning.

Example: Reading a passage from Ananda Sutram and sitting with it — asking “what does this actually mean?” — rather than memorizing it mechanically.

5. Aparigraha — Non-possessiveness

Non-indulgence in amenities and comforts superfluous to the preservation of life; minimizing resource consumption. Excessive comfort creates torpidity in the mind and dulls spiritual intuition. What one hoards for oneself is deprived from others who might need it for survival. Aparigraha is also an ecological principle.

Example: Buying a second car for convenience when public transport is available, or hoarding wealth while neighbors live in poverty — both violate Aparigraha.

5. Iishvara Pranidhana — Surrender to the Supreme

Accepting Brahma as the sole shelter and goal of life, and moving toward that Supreme shelter with accelerating speed through meditation. This is the most important and entirely internal principle of Niyama. It consists in detaching the mind from worldly preoccupations and moving ever deeper within — culminating in the merging of the mind with Supreme Consciousness, where the feeling of I-ness is lost in the Infinite Ocean of Consciousness, absorbed in limitless, eternal, all-pervasive ecstasy — Ananda.

Practice: Meditate at least twice a day — in the morning and in the evening.

Ananda Marga