

Yamas

Raja Yoga is a yogic path intended to achieve control over the mind and emotions. The Yamas and Niyamas are the first two limbs of the Eight Limb Path of Raja Yoga: They are to be practiced together to cleanse the mind states and help us develop a continuous and enlightening state of balance for every day of our lives here on earth. They help us build a **strong foundation** collecting and channeling our life force energies to then lift upward above the madness of life. Even when things are really challenging, while practicing the yamas and niyamas, we will be able to remain strong and spiritually competent as we become more grounded, resilient, balanced and centered. The eight limbs are: 1) Yamas (Restraints) and 2) Niyamas (Observances) which should be practiced together; 3) Asana (Physical Postures) and 4) Pranayama (Breath Control) which are to be worked together. And from this calm and harmonious being we begin to practice 5) Pratyahara (Sense-Withdrawal), 6) Dharana (Concentration), 7) Dhyana (Meditation), and 8) Samadhi (The Unification of Consciousness). In this teaching we will explore 1) Yamas and particularly the foundation of all the Yamas, Ahimsa, which is non-harming. I also want to stress the importance of a strong moral compass or a strong foundation to assist you on your spiritual path of santosha, but also on any path you are on in which you want to succeed with integrity. 2) How an accumulation of good karma comes from practicing the yamas. 3) The definition of Purity and how it relates to being truthful and accepting of ourselves. 4) Aparigraha (non-greed) and how it relates to addiction and 5) How the practices of SR can move the scattered energies of grasping and greediness inward and upward to balanced self awareness and consciousness.

Yamas are a moral code of conduct: Every system and healing modality has its own moral code of conduct. If you are a doctor, nurse, Thai practitioner, Christian, Buddhist, lawyer, you have a written or verbal set of morals codes in which to follow so that you can be the very best that you can be in that field and with integrity. In Yoga we call these Yamas and Niyamas. Yamas are actions that we are to abstain from and niyamas are actions that we are to observe in order to bring our energies into a balanced state. In Kriya Yoga we are always striving to bring our energies into a balanced state (sattva), not desiring too much or having too much passion (ragas) nor dispassion or indifference (tamas). In other words we are striving to feel stable and confident in ourselves physically, emotionally and spiritually without a whole lot of effort. Once we start practicing the yamas and niyamas, we build a foundation that supports us at all times in all circumstances as it becomes our personality. Without this integrity and stable foundation, we know not ourselves and are not able to decipher universal truth and spiritual connection from the illusions of false happiness (maya), separateness and deception.

Here is a list of the Yamas written in their positive Sanskrit word:

1. Ahimsa – non-violence
2. Satya – non-lying
3. Asteya – non-stealing
4. Brahmacharya – non-promiscuous
5. Aparigraha – non-greed

Ahimsa means non-violence. The practice of non-violence, as with all the yamas, exist on three levels; intellectual, verbal and physical. According to Goswami Kriyananda, ***‘The main source of non-violence is within our intellects. Our intellects ascertain harmonious and inharmonious energies of the mind which eventually will play out in speech and eventually in action.’***¹ So therefore to master ahimsa, we control the mind from thinking inharmonious thoughts. And how do we control the intellect from thinking hurtful thoughts? There are many ways of which I wish to discuss three ways in which to free ourselves from hurtful thoughts:

1. Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti. There is an entire teaching on this practice. Free yourself from negative thinking. Free me, free them. Free them, free me. Let the hurt be healed, let the karma be dissolved.
2. The mind is plastic and it will bend the direction it is used to and to those grooves which are the deepest. So when you notice yourself having a negative thought towards yourself or others, refresh the mind by thinking three positive attributes of the person or situation. Make new grooves in the mind!
3. When you realize you have verbalized hurtfulness, reflect back on your thought process before you spoke out. What was the underlying thoughts that caused the verbal context. Self-awareness is key. Self mastery over the mind is our path to happiness and contentment. And we can start simply by beginning to notice our thoughts in relation to our words and actions.

Verbal ahimsa looks like name calling, insulting statements, sarcasm, and angry speech. Intellectual harming of self is a four word sentence that I hear all the time, "I cant do this". Whether it is in a yoga class with physical postures, or when we are trying a new thing, like learning the guitar or learning how to crochet. We set ourselves up for failure. If we could just be present with ourselves when trying new things and be our own friend. If a friend were to tell us that they were going to learn something new, we would say "you go girl, you can learn the guitar. That is so cool of you". So in many respects we are much, much tougher on ourselves. Once we start being gentle, compassionate and harmonious in our thoughts, we will speak more softly, more kindly and more wisely. And more wisely may be not speaking at all!
Listening can be a beautiful ahimsa practice!!

Physical ahimsa is non-harming others and self through bruising, cutting, or wounding. Physical harming of self may also look like improper diet, over exercising, and mode of living. Anything that causes harm to the body. Physical harming is going too far into a pose because we think we should be able to touch the floor or touch our toes.

Karma and ahimsa. Practice of ahimsa brings about an accumulation of good karma in this lifetime and other lifetimes. It not only brings about a centered and balanced state of mind, but it magnetically and mystically draws into your life non-violent people and events. When you begin to develop self worth and stability from the practice of ahimsa you open yourself to receiving kindness from others. You open yourself to new opportunities of growth, happiness and contentment (santosha). All this along with sending out peace blessings (Om Shanti) will produce the good karma you need to neutralize and soften your inharmonious tank of karma.

Ahimsa is the most recognized and important yama discussed and practiced in Kriya Yoga. It is upon this yama that the foundation for the other yamas are established. And it is upon this practice of ahimsa that we move through life creating a higher vibrational attitude. Do you notice when you are around a negative person, it starts to wear on you and pretty soon you are cussing too. The same thing can happen with compassion and gentleness. As you soften your voice, the room quiets, and soon others will start speaking just a bit more softly. And I guarantee you when you can hold your head high because you have mastered ahimsa, the world will step aside and support you on your path to happiness, contentness and bliss. It is said in the Gita that to become enlightened (free of the cycle of death and rebirth), one can meditate, but if one cannot meditate, then one can learn concentration and if one cannot learn concentration then one can go about doing good deeds! Practicing ahimsa and doing good deeds alone can bring you to a state of samadhi!

Recap: What can you do to practice ahimsa? Self Awareness! Start noticing your thoughts! And then change them!!

The second yama is Satya or truthfulness. What is really important here is truthfulness should only be spoken when it is non harming to others. Words and thoughts should always be examined before speaking to ensure those words will bring good to all, and no harm to any or all. Here is a yogi story from Goswami Kriyananda's book, *The Spiritual Science of Kriya Yoga*: Once upon a yogi time, a saint was meditating in a forest and a deer passed by. Shortly there after, a hunter came pursuing the deer and asked the saint, 'Did you see the deer?' The saint spoke saying, 'Yes, I have seen the deer.' Then the hunter asked, 'Which way did it go?' Now, if the saint tells the truth, the hunter will kill the deer. If, on the other hand, he does not tell the truth, he will violate the practice of verbal truthfulness. What should he do? It is late in the year, and if the saint does not speak truth, the hunter and family will starve. What should he do?

What is truthfulness and how do I know that my truth aligns with what is good. Truthfulness is honesty, accuracy, reality, purity, ect... But how do I know that my truthfulness or my perception of reality is really true? I think we really have to look at what state of mind, the perception came from. For example, did your truth come from a moment of anger at yourself or another after a heated discussion? Or does your perception of truth come after a nice meditation in which you were able to soften or eliminate the boundaries of your ego and feel a sense of oneness to life? Can you see how those two truths would be different? Maybe a way to put this is, does your truth align with universal truth?

Truthfulness and Purity: Do your thoughts, words and deeds align with each other? Are you pure in your thoughts, words and deeds? An example of non-purity in truthfulness would be to say the meal is fabulous thinking all along how unappetizing it smells and making up some excuse why you did not eat. Truthfulness and purity of mind mean that our thoughts, words and actions align with each other.

Truthfulness begins with self. Are we being honest with ourselves? Do we take the time to sit with ourselves in loving awareness and become aware of our feelings, our desires and our fears. Can we sit with ourselves in these states without judgment but with respect and a sense of integrity for the journey to become more self aware in every moment and evolve in our spiritual life. Not many beings are born enlightened and karma free. We are here to learn, to heal, to evolve and to mature. Its a journey. Enjoy the journey. But know it may be rocky at times!!

Physical Truthfulness: As truthfulness becomes unified in mind and speech so too will it reflect in our actions. This physical truthfulness uplifts the mind and tends to balance and uplift the pranic currents which is the goal of anyone walking a spiritual path.

The third yama is asteya. Asteya is non-stealing, in thoughts, words or deeds. Do not take from another, intellectually, verbally or physically without permission. Taking objects from another without permission is stealing. Also taking someone's idea without permission is stealing. Taking someone's joy from them is stealing. This one spoke to me loudly. How often, out of jealousy, do we steal people's joy and happiness by thinking, they do not deserve to be joyful or happy? Be happy for others!! Be happy for your own successes!! Truly be happy for others and others will be happy for your success and joy!! And this will produce wonderful karma!! How do we steal from ourselves? By not appreciating our own gifts. I can hear myself say "oh it was just luck that my pottery firing went well". Acknowledge your hard work and your gifts!

Brahmacharya is non-promiscuous. For someone in the monk-hood it would mean refrain from sensuality. But for householder or our purposes, it means, to stay in conduct of one's own soul. Meaning that spending sensual time with another is to share love, joy, oneness and bliss with them, a soulful act of love. Brahmacharya is to refrain from thoughts, words or actions that do not align with your souls purpose to connect with another, and/or to gain pleasure or give pleasure to another.

Aparigraha

Aparigraha or Non-greed is the fifth but second most important yama to be practiced because it is the most important element in controlling the life-energy. When we fail to reign in on our sense organs and our desires, our life-energy is scattered and we find ourselves reaching out, almost grasping life, to satisfy the mind's desires. And in doing this we have attachment and the need to possess things! Aka Greed. According to GoSwami Kriyananda in his book, *The Spiritual Life of Kriya Yoga*, the great sage Vyasa states that non-greed is the attainment of remaining detached from the enjoyment of sense, not from the objects themselves. The craving for pleasures and gratifications of sense objects intensifies and activates beyond normalcy the organs of these senses, causing a person to commit violence, in one way or another, against others, and/or against their own self. This is so important, so let's take drinking as an example. It is not the glass of wine that is the problem. And neither is the pleasure one might receive from the sense organ of taste. Or maybe even the feeling of relaxation one gets from a glass of wine. The danger here is when the mind begins to crave the taste or crave the relaxation feeling from the glass of wine- then it reaches out to the senses to fulfill that craving. When the mind is craving and desiring, it may begin to feel that it never has enough and feels the need to possess, and this scatters our life-force energies. You can think about it as both your arms and hands out grabbing on to whatever they can reach. When we start craving, we start grasping for more, we start doing unthinkable things to possess what the mind desires. This is greed! So, what can we do when we crave? What if we could gather our life-force, draw it inward and then direct it upward to a higher state of consciousness? We do this at every meeting when we do the Kriya rotation. We can do this through meditation, chanting, hatha yoga (physical yoga postures) or reading a really good book or some kind of art form that brings you into the very present moment! The higher state of consciousness doesn't even have to be that high if you think about your state of consciousness when you are grasping at the pleasures of life! This does not mean that we cannot enjoy life, a beautiful hat, a good cup of coffee or comfortable driving car. But our wants should be harmonious to our spiritual advancement and sense of being. As we move to a centered being and to a place of self-awareness we can see the nature of the mind and see the grasping or the greed seeking tendencies.

The mind will try to rationalize that the senses are being satisfied. This is intellectual greed. But the senses in and of themselves have not the faculties to evaluate, judge and proclaim satisfied. It is the mind or the intellect that can discriminate what is good for the mind, body and soul of an individual. So what is being said here is this: The object of greed or desires is not the problem. The sense organs sensing the objects of greed or desire are not the problem. **The disharmony arises when the mind is not centered and balanced and it says "hey senses, isn't this the most fabulous thing you have ever sensed, lets get more"**. But when we have gained a stable foundation and the life-energies are centered and a state of balanced self-awareness exists, we see the desires of the mind and we also see that we are not the mind, neti, neti, neti, The mind is just the director. In a centered and balanced state of being, the intellect follows what is harmonious for our livelihood. In an unbalanced, scattered state of being, the mind looks for the sense organs to reach out to seek any kind of momentary pleasure. And in this state of being, it is almost impossible for the soul to seek lasting happiness in a loving awareness consciousness.

So maybe instead of beating ourselves up for desiring, craving, and grasping, we can see the nature of the mind and just do sadhana (daily practice), because the more we grasp (hear me) to be sober or healthy eaters, the more our mind reacts and says "hey, you want me to give up what". Never mind the mind! Ha, I like it, neti, neti, neti; just move to your practice. Just step back, (go into the bathroom ;)) and do your Kriya breath (rotate up through the chakras). Step aside and do some mental alternating breathing. If your foundational practice is even slightly strong, this will become second nature. Move away from the mind, not the senses, that the objects of pleasures. Move away from the mind, see the objects of desire as objects. Objects have no reason to want to cause unhappiness. They are just objects. Another reading from Kriyananda's book; the senses in and of themselves have no judgmental, evaluative, or discriminatory faculties. It is the function of the sense organ to sense. It is the function of the intellect to establish what is beneficial to the entire vehicle and not merely for the titillation of the sense organs.

Verbal non-greed is refrain from using words to entice the sense organs. Or being overly talkative. Say what needs to be said in as few words as possible. *Mauna* is a yogic practice of silence. What this says is that quietness also brings the energies inward instead of scattering the energies “out there.”

Physical non-greed is practicing detachment and seeking only what your needs are. And seeking only what which is harmonious to your spiritual maturity. Also, physical non-greed is to refrain from being jealous of the prosperity of others. Do not wish to have what others have but realize your needs at this station in life and acquire these needs by your own honest labor.

On a very subtle level and spiritual level to practice aparigraha is to fulfill the debts that have come to you through friendships, teachers and parents. The five debts in Yoga are: debt to parents, to friends, to ones culture, to saints and sages of the past and to ones spiritual preceptor. And these debts can be repaid by simply unfolding spiritually!! letting go of the negative dust bunnies and letting your light shine! Teaching, sharing and maturing. I think there is also another debt that is important and that is to Mother Earth. I think it is extremely important for our spiritual evolution and in obtaining good karma is to leave this Earth plane just a bit better than whence you came. This may seem hard to imagine with environmental change and global warming going on, but we can do all that we can do to appreciate Mother Earth by providing rather than taking, and by genuine gratitude of Mother Earth’s gifts rather than seeing Nature as a commodity to play in and take from.

What can you do to practice aparigraha:

- Do your practice everyday! Meditate, do the Kriya rotation, discern, become self-aware, draw your life-energies inward. Vow to step back when the mind desires and craves, and see the mind as the mind doing what the mind does; desiring, following patterns, rituals. Then move inward to the souls desire to move up jacob’s ladder to higher consciousness. And don’t beat yourself up for losing over to the minds desire once in awhile. Enjoy the indulge and move on. More time will lapse between indulging as your practice gets stronger and stronger. And as your practice gets stronger and stronger, your conscious mind will begin to communicate and see your subconscious mind. This is the ultimate goal of yoga. When your conscious mind and your subconscious mind begin to merge, those lurking hidden wants and desires and tendencies will not be able to tun the show!!

Do the practices. Make a commitment to you and you alone to do the practices. Ask Ganesha to sweep clear your path so that you can make time and effort to do the practices. Do this for yourself. Do for yourself that which no other can do for you!! Do for yourself that which you cannot do for others.

Shanti, Shanti, Shantih