

The Yamas and Niyamas

The yamas and niyamas are the first two limbs to Patanjali's eight limbs of yoga. There are many translations of the meaning of these Sanskrit terms, but I especially like the interpretations by Alistair Shearer in his poetic book, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, first published in 1982, then out of print, and recently republished in a beautiful new edition. The descriptions of the meaning of yama and niyama are from Donna Farhi's book, *Yoga Mind Body & Spirit*.

Yamas

Characteristics observed and codified by wise people since the beginning of time as being central to any life lived in freedom.

Ahimsa - Living in a dynamic peacefulness that is prepared to meet all situations with a loving openness. A state of living free from fear.

Satya - Impeccability in thought, speech and action. Commitment to the truth.

Asteya - Not stealing. We steal when we identify with a limited self, and are ignorant to our real nature, which is a fullness of Being that needs no addition.

Brahmacharya - Means literally moving in the Immensity, or living in Reality, but has traditionally referred to sexual celibacy. Brahmacharya does not mean self-control as normally understood, but is a state of self-sufficient wholeness, an innocence that is its own ecstasy.

Aparigraha - Literally not grasping, and refers to the state that comes spontaneously as the mind begins to experience the effortless Being of the Self; viewing the world in a more generous perspective.

NIYamas

The niyamas constitute a code for living in a way that fosters the soulfulness of the individual, and has to do with the choices we make.

Shaucha - Cleanliness. The word describes a mind which is clear, uncluttered and straightforward.

Santosha - Contentment, satisfaction. The equanimity that sees things as they are, undistorted by expectation, need, or fear.

Tapas - Can be translated as fire, heat, brilliance, or ardor. The word describes yoga as a process of transmutation, an inner alchemy that burns away the dross of ignorance.

Svadhyaya - Study conducive to self knowledge. Refers specifically to study of scriptures. These records are spiritual food, nourishing the personality and imbuing the mind with positive and elevating influence.

Ishvarapranidhana - The concept of devotion as a means of cultivating the finer levels of feeling. It may be directed in various ways — to one's concept of God, a teacher, a loving partner, or humanity in general. The end result, the awakening of the finest levels of feeling, will eventually lead the devotee to appreciate the subtlest level of life.