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## YAMA AND NIYAMA

Dear learner, Patanjali has given Ashtanga Yoga or eight steps of yoga which are Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. The first two steps that Patanjali describes are the fundamental ethical rule or code called Yamas and the Niyamas. These can also be looked at as universal moral principles and personal observances. Yamas deal with right personal attitude. Niyamas are social disciplines as to how we deal with people around us. It is advised we should match our inner attitude with the external action.



### OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to :

- explain the basics of Yamas;
- list the types of Yamas;
- explain the basics of Niyamas; and
- list the types of Niyamas.



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## 2.1 YAMA

Yama is mainly classified in five characteristics of Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth fullness), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmcharya (chastity) and Aparigraha (non-possesiveness). Lets understand with story.

### I. AHIMSA (non-violence)

Ahimsa means non-violence. One can hurt a person in three ways namely, by deeds, by words or by thought! All three forms of hurting are not good and one should avoid these. Sometimes we hurt others without realizing it. Normally, you do harm without thought. One throw stones at animals without any reasons, catch insects, butterflies etc. This is a pass time which gives much pain to these creatures. Our shastras say that such acts invite punishment. Here is a story which illustrates this law.

In the past, there was a pious Maharshi called Mandavya. He spent whole of his time in the forest doing Tapas. He used to observe silence for long periods. One day thieves entered the palace of the king of the land and stole some jewels. The guards woke up but before they could catch them, the thieves ran away with the jewels. The guards chased them and the thieves entered the forest. The guards gave them hot chase and the thieves were about to be caught. They then saw the Maharshi and dumped all the jewels near him and escaped with their lives. The guards saw the Maharshi with the eyes closed and all the stolen jewels lying in a heap near him. They concluded that the Maharshi was the



leader of the robbers and they presented him before the king along with the jewels. When the king questioned the Maharshi he kept silent as he was observing mauna vrata. The king was convinced that the Maharshi was guilty and ordered that he be put to death by being pierced by a spear. Though, he was innocent the Maharshi had to undergo punishment. At the time of death, the Maharshi suddenly remembered that during his childhood he used to amuse himself by catching insects and pricking them with thorns and that the punishment that he was undergoing was the result of that sin. He immediately instructed his disciples who were present there to be non-violent always and died peacefully. We should therefore never willfully harm any creature however small it may be.

## **II. SATYA (Truth Fulness)**

Satya means "to speak the truth," yet it is not always desirable to speak the truth on all occasions, for it could harm someone unnecessarily. We have to consider what we say, how we say it, and in what way it could affect others. If speaking the truth has negative consequences for another, then it is better to say nothing. Let us understand the Satya by a story

One day a wood cutter's axe accidentally fell into a river. The poor wood cutter made a good search in the water. But his efforts were in vain. Finally, he burst into tears. Hearing his sobs, God appeared before him. The God disappeared into the river and came up carrying a golden axe. The wood cutter did not accept it. He stated that his axe was not made of iron.



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God disappeared and soon returned with a silver axe. The wood cutter again denied that it was his axe.

God once again plunged into the river. It soon reappeared carrying the axe of the wood cutter. The poor man greeted the angel with words of profuse thanks and great joy.

God was impressed by the man's honesty.

He presented him with the golden and silver axes in recognition of his truthful nature.

### III. ASTEYA (Non-stealing)

Asteya is a third of Yama. Steya means "to steal" Asteya is the opposite-to take nothing that does not belong to us. Lack of gratitude can fuel an unhealthy desire for things that we don't currently have, such as name brand clothes, or the most supped up car. The root cause of asteya comes from the thinking, "I'm not good enough," and "I don't have enough." The need to steal essentially arises because of the lack of faith in ourselves to be able to create what we need by ourselves. The moment we feel a sense of "lack" in life; desire, want and greed emerge. This steals our own contentment away from the things that we have now that are bringing purpose and happiness to our life. Let us understand the Asteya by a story

#### THIEF AND MERCHANT

A diamond thief who stole only the most precious gems spotted a well-known diamond merchant purchasing the most beautiful diamond and decided to steal it. He started following the merchant



catching a train, and shared a compartment with him for three days. He spent his entire time, trying to find the diamond, but despite all his endeavors he failed to locate it. When the train reached its destination the thief, restless in his incapacity, could not contain himself and told the merchant the truth; "Sir, I've been following you everywhere for the last three days trying to find the rare gem you purchased. But to my despair I have not been able to get my hand on it. Please tell me where you hide it and put me out of my misery!" The merchant said: "When I first saw you, I suspected you were a pickpocket and so hide the gem where I thought you'd never look-in your own pocket!" And with that he reached into the thief's pocket and brought out the amazing gem which was in the thief's possession all along.

The above story of the thief and merchant shows that whatever we want to steal and are desperately seeking, is in our own pocket. All we have to do is look!

#### **IV. APARIGRAHA (Non-possessiveness)**

Aparigraha means to take only what is necessary, and not to take advantage of a situation or act greedy. We should only take what we have earned; if we take more, we are exploiting someone else. Let us understand the Aparigraha by a story

#### **GREEDY BRAHMINS**

There is another great story about the wisdom of Tenali Rama. The famous King of Vijayanagar, Krishnadevaraya's, mother was a very pious and orthodox lady. She had visited all holy places



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and given much of her treasures in charity to temples. Once she showed the desire of giving away the fruits in charity and her son, the king, obliged.

Krishnadevaraya immediately got many mangoes from Ratnagiri. He respected his mother a lot and never let her down. Unfortunately, before the auspicious day could arrive, his mother died.

Krishnadevaraya followed all religious rites. They went on for many days. On the last day, the king called some brahmins and said, 'my mother's last wish was to offer mangoes to brahmins. But she could not fulfil this wish and died. What can I do so that my mother's last wish could be fulfilled and she can rest in peace?'

The brahmins were greedy. They said that only if the king would give each brahmin a gold mango, would his mother be able to rest in peace. Krishnadevaraya on hearing this immediately ordered some gold mangoes to be made and presented them to the Brahmins, thinking now his mother would be happy and peaceful.

Tenali Rama heard about this and he called those brahmins to his home to perform the last rite ceremonies of his own mother.

When the brahmins came to Tenali's house Tenali closed all the doors and windows and stood in front of them with a red hot iron rod. The brahmins were taken aback, but Tenali removed their confusion.

'My mother had knee pains and as a remedy she wanted me to



cure her with these hot iron rods. But she died before I could help her. So now I want to fulfil her wish by giving you all this treatment', Tenali said to the brahmins.

The brahmins were shocked and said that it is an injustice on them and that they will not be a part of it.

But Tenali said that since they had taken the golden mangoes from the king because that way it could provide peace to his dead mother, this was the way Tenali's mother could find peace.

The greedy brahmins understood that they have not done right and they returned the mangoes to the King.

Later, Tenali Rama told king Krishnadevaraya that the treasure of the palace should not be exploited by giving them to such greedy people. Instead, it should be put to feed and serve the needy.

The above, story of three bhramin's shows you that one should not be greedy and take more than they need. By following Aparigraha one will elevate to greater heights.

## **2.2 NIYAMA**

Niyama means "rules" or "laws." These are the rules prescribed for personal observance. Like the Yamas, the five Niyamas are not exercises or actions to be simply studied. They represent far more than an attitude. Let us understand each Niyama's with a story.

### **I. SHAUCHA**

The first Niyama is Saucha, meaning purity and cleanliness. Shaucha has both an inner and an outer aspect. Outer cleanliness



simply means keeping ourselves clean. Inner cleanliness has as much to do with the healthy, free functioning of our bodily organs as with the clarity of our mind. Let us understand the Shaucha by a story.

### THREE BEST FRIENDS

In a village there were three best friends - Mohan, Lalith and Arjun. They studied in the same school. All the three were good in their studies. They all liked the school. It was the place where they all met. They never missed school. Their village was very beautiful. Many tourists visited this place. Once Arjun didn't come to school for five days. Lalith and Mohan were worried. They decided to visit Arjun. They were shocked to see the place where he lived. It was very dirty. There was stagnant water on the roads where they saw mosquitoes breeding. Waste was thrown all around. When they reached Arjuns house they saw that he was down with very high fever. His mother told them that he had malaria.

She was crying badly. Arjun looked very soft and tired. He could hardly talk. Malaria is a disease that is spread by mosquitoes. It affects the liver and blood cells. His father told them that due to unhealthy living conditions very few tourists visited the place. The next day the boys told the class about Arjun. They decided to do something for their friend. So they decided to clean the place during the weekend. So the students gathered in the street and divided themselves into small groups and started cleaning the place. They swept the roads, collected the waste and threw it



in the dustbin. They also cleared the dirty water. Thus, the mosquitoes became less. They continued the cleaning process every week. This was an eye opener for the people staying around. They slowly started participating in the cleaning spree. All were happy and the place became clean and tidy. More people wanted to clean their streets also. Hence small groups were formed and more places were cleaned. Very few people fell sick. Tourists started visiting the village as before.

The principal appreciated the children in the assembly. The district collector too appreciated the children for making the people aware. The cleaning effort of the people of the village was shown on the TV. Many states also adopted the cleaning movement. Slowly it became a national movement. Thus a small movement that started in a small village spread to the whole country. Finally, even the President one day declared that our India is a clean India.

If we want our country to be a clean and healthy place to live, we should first keep our house and surroundings clean. Not only external cleanliness, but internal cleanliness is also needed.

## **II. SANTHOSHA**

Another Niyama is Santosha, modesty and the feeling of being content with what we have. To be at peace within and content with one's lifestyle, finding contentment, even while experiencing life's difficulties for life becomes a process of growth through all kinds of circumstances. Let us understand the Santhosha by a story.



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## DISCONTENTED KING

Once, there was a king named Kushala. He was a very kind king. He had everything, wealth, health, army, etc. Kushala was the most powerful king. The only problem was that, he was not contented with whatever he had. As he was a kind king, the God gave him a blue magical crystal. Through it, King Kushala was able to transform into anything. It was time for his morning walk. As it was the day time, the sun was very bright and shiny. The king was jealous and with the help of the magical crystal, he transformed himself into the sun. He was very amazed. After that he was shining brightly. Suddenly there were clouds everywhere in the sky. The clouds didn't even allow a single ray of the sun to reach the ground. The king was angry with the clouds, so he transformed into the clouds. He had fun floating in the air. Suddenly, there was a mountain in his way. He tried to move it from his path. But as a cloud he was too weak to move a mountain and he splits into many pieces. He thought that the mountain is stronger than a cloud. Thus, he turned into a mountain. Suddenly there were some stone cutter coming to cut the stone from the mountain. They began to cut down the stone from the mountain. The king thought again that the stone cutters that follow the rules of the king are stronger than a big mountain. With the help of the magical crystal, he transformed into a stone cutter. His king gave him the order to cut some stone and bring it to his soldiers. When he went to do his work. The king realized that how hard it is to be worker because he was not knowing the experience because he was the king and was not knowing



anything about the hard work. Finally, he decided to be a king again. He learnt a lesson from it that being contented with whatever he had was so important. He forgets to be a greedy person, but didn't forget to be a kind person!

By the above story we can understand that being contented with what we have is very important. The king Kushala who had everything in his life was not contented. Once he realized that happiness lies in us not out he was very happy.

### **III. TAPAS**

Tapas refers to the activity of keeping the body fit and handle the inner urges without outer show. Literally, it means to heat the body and, by so doing, to cleanse it. Behind the notion of Tapas lies the idea we can direct our energy to enthusiastically engage life and achieve our ultimate goal of creating union with the Divine. Let us understand the Tapas by a story.

### **NACHIKETA**

There is an inspiring story in the Kathopanishad about a little boy named Nachiketa. He was the son of Udalak Rishi. Once Udalak organized a yajna to please the deities. It was customary in those days to donate cows to brahmins at the end of the Yajna. Udalak was a miser and he donated old and weak cows to the brahmins. None of the cows yielded any milk. This disturbed Nachiketa. He asked his father about it, "Father, to whom would you give me in charity?" This made his father very angry, but he decided not to say anything. When Nachiketa repeated the



question, Udalak lost his temper and said, "I give you to Yama." Yama is the king of Yamapuri-hell. Hearing this Nachiketa went to Yama's kingdom. It was his father's command. It would not be proper for him to disobey his father. 'I should fulfil his wish,' thought Nachiketa, even if it means leaving home.

However, his father realized his mistake and tried to stop him, but Nachiketa did not stop. He reached the Yama's kingdom and was told by Yama's guards that he had gone out for three days. Nachiketa decided to wait on his doorstep till he returned. He waited for three days. No food, no water. Three fasts! Yama returned on the fourth day and saw little Nachiketa at his doorstep. He felt pained for keeping a brahmin waiting without welcoming him, without food and water. It was a sin not to welcome an atithi (guest) at the doorstep. He scolded his wife for not welcoming him. Both rushed around the house to serve Nachiketa. One went to fetch water. The other brought a mat for him to sit on. Yama still did not feel completely satisfied in serving him. So he told Nachiketa, "dear child, I have offended you by keeping you waiting for three days. To wash my sin I request you to ask for three boons."

Nachiketa declared, "My first wish is, when I return home may my father welcome me lovingly. My second wish is to grant me the knowledge by which I can be worthy of living in the heavens. My third and last wish is to grant me Atmagnanam -knowledge of the Atma." Yama granted the first two boons immediately and tried to convince Nachiketa to give up his third wish. He offered him gold, pearls, coins, horses, elephants and even the happiness



of Swarg (heaven) instead. "No, I do not wish for anything else," replied Nachiketa firmly. Finally, Yama granted him the third boon too, and Nachiketa was enlightened with the knowledge of the Atma.

The Nachiketa inspires us to be strong willed to do something one has decided, even in the face of difficulties and obstacles and to seek for eternal happiness. This story also inspires us to be kind to all creatures and to respect one's parents.

#### **IV. SWADHYAYA**

The fourth Niyama is Swadhyaya. Swa means 'self' Adhyaya means 'inquiry' or 'examination'. Let us understand the Swadhyaya by a story.

#### **SATYAKAMAA**

You all know who Guru Dronacharya was ? He was the royal Guru (teacher) of the Pandavas and Kauravas. He used to teach military art to the princes. Once, a boy named Ekalavya asked Guru Dronacharya, "Gurudev, will you teach me the art of archery?" Ekalavya aspired to study archery in the gurukul of Dronacharya, the greatest known teacher. Dronacharya was in a dilemma as he had promised King Bhishma that he will teach this art only to the princes. Ekalavya was not a prince, so Dronacharya was hesitant to teach him and he duly conveyed his refusal to Ekalavya.

Deeply sad by Dronacharya's rejection, Ekalavya returned home.



However, he was determined to master the art of archery. So, he went into the forest and prepared a clay statue of Guru Dronacharya. He accepted the statue as his Guru and practiced archery in front of it every single day. After practicing for years together, Ekalavya eventually became an exceptional archer.

Once Guru Dronacharya took the Pandava and Kaurava princes to the forest for practicing archery. A dog was also accompanying them. The dog wandered away from the place of practice and deep in the forest, came across Ekalavya and started barking at him. Disturbed in his practice by the dog, Ekalavya aimed seven arrows in the dog's mouth with such caution and skill that it stopped his barking without injuring the dog. The dog returned to the place where the princes were practising. Dronacharya was amazed to see the dog's state. He was wondering how such a success could be achieved. Dronacharya and his students investigated, and came upon Ekalavya, practicing archery. On seeing Dronacharya, Ekalavya was filled with joy. He bowed down to him.

Dronacharya asked Ekalavya, "Where did you learn archery?". Pointing towards the clay statue, Ekalavya replied, "Under you, O Guru." Ekalavya had learnt archery by self introspect and effort with immense devotion and reverence towards his Guru Dronacharya.

From the above, story of Ekalavya we can understand how he got mastery over archery through his Swadhyaya or self introspect.



## **INTEXT QUESTIONS 1.1**

1. What is Yama?
2. What is Niyama?



## **WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT**

In this lesson you have understood what is Yama and Niyama. In Yama you have understood Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya and Aparigraha. In Niyama Saucha, Santhosha, Tapas and Swadyaya.

We have understood Yama with following stories:

- Ahimsa with insects and Sadhu
- Satya with story of Ekalavya
- Asteya with Thief And Merchant
- Aparigraha with Greedy Brahmins

We have understood Niyama with following the stories:

- Saucha with Three Best Friends
- Santhosha with Discontented King
- Tapas with Nachiketa
- Sawdyaya with Ekalavya



## **TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. What is Aparigraha?
2. What is Swadhyaya?



**Notes**



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## ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

### 2.1

1. The Yama's are 'wise characteristics'. Rather, than a list of do's and don'ts, "they tell us that our fundamental nature is compassionate, generous, honest and peaceful."
2. Niyama means 'rules' or 'laws'. These are the rules prescribed for personal observance. Like the Yamas, the five Niyamas are not exercises or actions to be simply studied. They represent far more than an attitude.