

# SKM YOGA

Yoga Teacher Training Programme

---

## YAMA & NIYAMA

for Yoga Teachers Training Students

A Complete Study in Ten Lessons

---

*The Ethical & Moral Foundations of the Yogic Path*

Compiled by

**Dr. Shivam Mishra**

Founder, SKM Yoga

Yoga Acharya | Wellness Educator | Author

---

© SKM Yoga — All Rights Reserved

***Guru Brahma, Guru Vishnu, Guru Devo Maheshvara***

*— The Guru is Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva — the Guru is the Supreme Truth*

*Dedicated to*

*Every sincere seeker who dares to look within,  
to question every assumption about who they are,  
and to walk the ancient path of Yama and Niyama  
with courage, humility, and an open heart.*

*— Dr. Shivam Mishra*

Lesson

# Foreword

*A Letter from the Founder*

---

Dear Student of SKM Yoga,

You have chosen one of the most courageous and sacred paths available to a human being in this age: you have decided to become a yoga teacher. Not merely someone who demonstrates postures, but a living transmission of an ancient science that has transformed human beings for thousands of years.

Before you can guide others through the doorways of the body and breath, before you can illuminate the philosophy of the great sages, and before you can hold space for another person's transformation — you must first do the foundational inner work. That work begins here, with Yama and Niyama.

In the eight-limbed path (Ashtanga Yoga) of Maharishi Patanjali, Yama and Niyama occupy the first two rungs of the ladder. They are not preliminary formalities to be ticked off and forgotten. They are the living roots of the entire yogic tree. Every asana you teach, every pranayama technique you share, every meditation instruction you offer — all of it rests on the quality of your ethical and personal foundation.

I have taught yoga for many years, worked with thousands of students, and guided hundreds of teachers. The single most consistent observation I have made is this: the depth of a teacher's practice is proportional to the depth of their relationship with Yama and Niyama. Teachers who bypass this foundational work may develop technical skill, but they lack the gravitational pull that makes a true guide. Students feel the difference, even if they cannot name it.

This book is written for you — the dedicated student of SKM Yoga Teacher Training. Each lesson is designed not just to be read, but to be lived. Every concept is accompanied by practical reflection, daily application, and the deeper philosophical context that transforms information into wisdom.

Read slowly. Practice every instruction. Wrestle with every question. Bring these teachings to your meditation cushion, your relationships, your kitchen table, your difficult conversations, and your moments of solitude. That is where Yama and Niyama come alive.

The world does not need more technically proficient yoga teachers. It needs human beings who have made a genuine commitment to truth, to non-violence, to purity of heart, and to the sustained, humble discipline of self-inquiry. It needs you — transformed by these teachings — standing steadily in front of your students.

With love and faith in your journey,

**Dr. Shivam Mishra**

*Founder, SKM Yoga*

## Lesson

# How to Use This Book

### *A Guide for the Sincere Student*

---

This book is structured as ten sequential lessons, each designed to be studied over a minimum of three to seven days. While it is tempting to read quickly in a single sitting, the material in each lesson requires time to permeate. Yama and Niyama are not intellectual concepts — they are living practices that reveal themselves through consistent application in daily life.

### Structure of Each Lesson

Every lesson follows a consistent format to support deep learning:

- Opening Sanskrit verse with translation and reflection
- Philosophical foundation — the classical and historical context of the principle
- Psychological dimension — how the principle operates in the modern mind
- Practical applications — specific daily practices and exercises
- Reflection questions — for journaling, discussion circles, and meditation
- Teaching implications — how this principle shapes your role as a yoga teacher
- Common misconceptions and how to navigate them with students

### How to Study

1. Read each lesson at least twice before moving to the next.
2. Keep a dedicated Yama-Niyama journal. Write your reflections, observations, and questions daily.
3. Choose one practice from the lesson and apply it consciously for seven days before moving forward.
4. Discuss the material with fellow YTT students. Group inquiry accelerates understanding.
5. Bring your observations to your personal practice. Notice how these principles appear in your asana, pranayama, and meditation.
6. Sit with the reflection questions before bed. Allow your sleeping mind to work on them.

### A Note on Authenticity

These teachings will sometimes make you uncomfortable. They will reveal patterns in your behaviour, thinking, and speech that you would prefer not to see. This discomfort is not a sign that something is wrong — it is evidence that the teaching is working. The yoga path has always asked us to become willing to see ourselves clearly. Meet that discomfort with kindness toward yourself and firmness of resolve.

# Table of Contents

---

- Foreword** A Letter from the Founder
- How to Use This Book** A Guide for the Sincere Student
- Lesson 1** Introduction to Yama & Niyama — The Two Pillars of Yoga Ethics
- Lesson 2** Ahimsa — The Practice of Non-Violence
- Lesson 3** Satya — The Practice of Truthfulness
- Lesson 4** Asteya & Brahmacharya — Non-Stealing and Right Use of Energy
- Lesson 5** Aparigraha — The Practice of Non-Possessiveness
- Lesson 6** Saucha — The Practice of Purity
- Lesson 7** Santosha — The Practice of Contentment
- Lesson 8** Tapas — The Practice of Disciplined Austerity
- Lesson 9** Svadhyaya — The Practice of Self-Study
- Lesson 10** Ishvara Pranidhana — Surrender to the Supreme
- Appendix A** Daily Sadhana for Yama & Niyama
- Appendix B** Reflection Journal Template
- Appendix C** Teaching Yama & Niyama to Your Students

## Lesson 1

# Introduction to Yama & Niyama

## *The Two Pillars of Yoga Ethics*

### ***Yoga chitta vritti nirodhah — Patanjali Yoga Sutras 1.2***

— *Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind*

## 1.1 The Architecture of the Ashtanga Path

When the great sage Maharishi Patanjali compiled the Yoga Sutras approximately two thousand years ago, he codified a complete system of human liberation that had been developed and refined over centuries of yogic inquiry. Within this masterwork of 196 aphorisms, Patanjali outlined the Ashtanga Marga — the Eight-Limbed Path — as the most systematic and complete map of inner transformation available to the human being.

The eight limbs are: Yama (ethical restraints), Niyama (personal observances), Asana (posture), Pranayama (breath regulation), Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation), and Samadhi (absorption). Most modern yoga practitioners are deeply familiar with Asana and may have some acquaintance with Pranayama and meditation, but the overwhelming majority have received little or no substantive education in the first two limbs — Yama and Niyama — which Patanjali placed deliberately and meaningfully at the very beginning of the path.

This placement is not accidental. Patanjali was a systematic thinker of extraordinary precision. He understood that no structure can stand without a foundation, no tree bears fruit without roots, and no aspirant can progress in the deeper practices of yoga without first establishing a stable ethical and personal foundation. Yama and Niyama are that foundation. Without them, the yoga practice remains at the level of physical culture — valuable but incomplete, like a magnificent temple built on sand.

## 1.2 What Are the Yamas?

The word 'Yama' comes from the Sanskrit root 'yam,' meaning to restrain, to control, or to regulate. The Yamas are therefore the ethical restraints — the great universal moral principles that govern how the yogi relates to the world, to other beings, and to the fabric of life itself. They are called 'Mahavratam' by Patanjali — the Great Vows — because they are universal in scope, applying to all people, in all places, at all times, without exception.

Patanjali outlines five Yamas in the second chapter of the Yoga Sutras (Sadhana Pada):

Yama	Sanskrit	Core Meaning	Domain
1. Non-Violence	Ahimsa	Absence of harm in thought, word, and deed	Relationship with all life
2. Truthfulness	Satya	Speaking and living in alignment with truth	Relationship with reality

3. Non-Stealing	Asteya	Not taking what has not been freely given	Relationship with others' abundance
4. Right Use of Energy	Brahmacharya	Wise management of vital force	Relationship with one's own energy
5. Non-Possessiveness	Aparigraha	Freedom from grasping and hoarding	Relationship with material world

What is remarkable about the Yamas is that they are not merely prohibitions or moral commandments. They are descriptions of the natural behaviour of a being who has realised their true nature. As the famous teacher Georg Feuerstein observed, 'The yamas are not moral rules imposed from without; they are the natural expression of a being who has attained a measure of self-realisation.' A person who genuinely experiences the oneness of all life does not need to be told to practise non-violence — they live it spontaneously, because they have recognised themselves in every being.

This understanding is crucial for the yoga teacher. Your task is not to impose these principles on your students like commandments, but to create conditions in which their practice of asana, pranayama, and meditation progressively dissolves the sense of separation that makes violation of these principles feel natural or inevitable. When a student deepens their practice, the Yamas begin to express themselves naturally.

### 1.3 What Are the Niyamas?

The word 'Niyama' is formed from the prefix 'ni' (into, within, downward) and the root 'yam' (to control, regulate). The Niyamas are therefore the inward observances — the personal disciplines and practices through which the yogi builds, purifies, and develops the interior landscape of their being. While the Yamas govern outward conduct, the Niyamas govern the inner life: the relationship with oneself.

Patanjali outlines five Niyamas in the Yoga Sutras 2.32:

Niyama	Sanskrit	Core Meaning	Dimension
1. Purity	Saucha	Physical and mental cleanliness	Body, mind, environment
2. Contentment	Santosha	Acceptance of what is	Emotional and psychological life
3. Disciplined Austerity	Tapas	Burning away impurities through discipline	Will, endurance, transformation
4. Self-Study	Svadyaya	Study of scriptures and of oneself	Intellectual and self-reflective life
5. Surrender to the Supreme	Ishvara Pranidhana	Devotion and surrender to the Divine	Spiritual life, ego transcendence

Together, the five Niyamas create a complete programme of inner development. Saucha purifies the vessel. Santosha creates the stability from which clear perception becomes possible. Tapas builds the inner fire and determination required for the demanding work of self-transformation. Svadyaya illuminates the nature of the mind and the nature of the Self. And Ishvara Pranidhana

dissolves the last fortress of the ego — the belief that we are the sole authors of our journey — by opening us to the grace and intelligence that pervades all things.

## 1.4 The Relationship Between Yama and Niyama

Yama and Niyama are not independent categories. They exist in a profound dynamic relationship, each supporting and deepening the other. When you practise non-violence in your relationships (Yama), your inner landscape becomes more peaceful, making Santosha (contentment) easier to sustain (Niyama). When you cultivate purity of body and mind through Saucha (Niyama), you naturally become more truthful and non-grasping in your outer conduct (Yama). The two limbs spiral upward together, each revolution taking the practitioner to a new level of integration.

A useful metaphor is that of a river and its banks. The Yamas are the banks — the boundaries that give the river direction, prevent it from spreading thin and stagnating, and guide its flow purposefully toward the sea. The Niyamas are the quality of the water itself — its purity, its temperature, its mineral content, its life-giving properties. A river needs both healthy banks and healthy water to nourish the landscape through which it flows. Your yoga teaching is that river. It will nourish your students to the precise degree that both the outer conduct (Yamas) and the inner life (Niyamas) are developed and integrated.

## 1.5 Yama and Niyama in the Modern Teaching Context

The yoga world of the 21st century faces a profound challenge: the commercialisation and superficialisation of a tradition that is, at its heart, a technology of liberation. In this environment, where yoga is frequently reduced to fitness, flexibility, and Instagram aesthetics, teachers who are grounded in Yama and Niyama become rare and precious. They carry something that no amount of asana training can replicate: genuine character.

When a student comes to your class in a state of pain — physical, emotional, or existential — they do not ultimately need your technical instruction. They need to be in the presence of someone whose inner life is stable, whose values are clear, whose practice is genuine, and whose presence communicates safety, depth, and possibility. That quality of presence is built, day by day and year by year, through the sincere cultivation of Yama and Niyama.

As you study the remaining nine lessons in this book, bring everything back to lived experience. Do not settle for intellectual understanding. Ask yourself daily: How am I practising Ahimsa in my thoughts? Where does Satya challenge me today? What does my relationship with possessions reveal about my inner state? These are the questions that transform a yoga student into a yoga teacher — and eventually, into a human being who is genuinely free.

## 1.6 Reflection Questions for Lesson 1

- Before reading further, list the five Yamas and five Niyamas from memory. What do you already understand about each? What is unfamiliar?
- Reflect on your relationship with your own ethical foundation. In what areas of life do you feel aligned with your deepest values? Where do you notice tension or compromise?
- Consider a yoga teacher you have admired or been inspired by. What qualities of character — beyond technical skill — made them impactful? How might those qualities relate to Yama and Niyama?
- Patanjali says the Yamas are the 'Great Vow' (Mahavratam) — universal, without exception. How does this challenge you personally?

- Write in your journal: 'The ethical principle I find most difficult to embody consistently in my life right now is ...' and explore why, without judgment.

*"The foundation of yoga is not flexibility of the body. It is integrity of character."*

## Lesson 2

# Ahimsa

## *The Radical Practice of Non-Violence*

---

### ***Ahimsa pratishtayam tat sannidhau vaira tyagah — Yoga Sutras***

#### **2.35**

— *When non-violence is established, all enmity is abandoned in the presence of that being*

## 2.1 The Primacy of Ahimsa

Ahimsa is not merely the first of the Yamas — it is, in a very real sense, the foundation upon which all the others rest. The word 'Ahimsa' is formed from the prefix 'a' (non, without) and 'himsa' (violence, harm, killing). It is usually translated as non-violence, but this translation is dangerously inadequate if it is taken to mean simply the absence of physical harm. True Ahimsa is a comprehensive orientation toward life that encompasses every thought, every word, every intention, every action, and every omission.

In the Jain tradition, which has perhaps the most elaborated philosophy of Ahimsa, the principle extends to the smallest organisms and the subtlest acts. Mahatma Gandhi, who made Ahimsa the central principle of his political and personal philosophy, described it as the greatest force available to humanity — more powerful, he argued, than any weapon, because it transforms adversaries rather than merely defeating them. Swami Vivekananda spoke of Ahimsa as the highest expression of strength, not weakness, because it requires an extraordinary degree of inner mastery to meet aggression, injustice, or fear with non-harming responses.

For the yoga teacher, Ahimsa is both the most immediate and the most demanding of the ethical principles. You encounter its challenge in the language you use to describe students' bodies, in the adjustments you offer, in the expectations you hold, in the comparisons you make — consciously or not. The practice of Ahimsa in the teaching context is a lifelong refinement.

## 2.2 Three Dimensions of Ahimsa

### **Ahimsa in Thought (Manas)**

The most pervasive and least examined dimension of non-violence operates in the realm of thought. Every moment of the day, the untrained mind generates a continuous commentary about oneself and others — evaluating, comparing, criticising, blaming, and dismissing. This internal violence is the root from which all spoken and acted violence eventually grows. A thought of contempt toward a student who cannot achieve a posture, a flash of irritation at a colleague who challenges you, a habit of harsh self-criticism after an imperfect class — these are all violations of Ahimsa, and they matter.

The practice of Ahimsa in thought begins with radical self-honesty. It requires you to observe the quality of your internal monologue without immediately trying to change it — because premature suppression merely drives the violent thoughts underground, where they continue to influence behaviour subtly. First, see clearly. Notice every instance of mental harshness, contempt,

dismissal, or aggression — toward yourself, toward students, toward other teachers, toward the tradition itself. Notice without judgment. Then, gradually and consistently, practise offering what Rumi called 'the guest house' to these thoughts — acknowledging their presence without identifying with them, and replacing them, one thought at a time, with something more aligned with the truth of interconnection.

## Ahimsa in Speech (Vak)

The yogic texts are extraordinarily precise about the conditions for right speech. Words carry prana — vital force. They have the capacity to heal, to open, to expand, and to liberate; equally, they carry the capacity to wound, to diminish, to close, and to imprison. A teacher who corrects a student with contempt in their voice, even if the correction is technically accurate, has violated Ahimsa in speech. A teacher who encourages competition between students, who makes jokes at a student's expense, who speaks dismissively of other yoga traditions, or who gossips about fellow teachers — all of these are violations.

The classical test for ahimsa in speech, found across multiple yogic and Vedic texts, asks three questions: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? These three questions, applied consistently to every utterance, can transform the quality of your communication beyond recognition. Notice that all three criteria must be satisfied. Something may be true and necessary but not kind — in which case, you find a way to make it kind before speaking. Something may be kind and true but not necessary — in which case, you allow silence to be the teaching. This is not dishonesty or avoidance; it is the sophisticated art of speech refined by Ahimsa.

## Ahimsa in Action (Karma)

The most visible dimension of Ahimsa manifests in physical actions, but here too the teaching extends far beyond obvious physical harm. In the yoga teaching context, this includes: the force applied in physical adjustments, the pace and intensity at which you sequence practices, the dietary and lifestyle choices you model and encourage, and the broader ecological and social choices you make as a human being in the world.

Physical adjustments deserve particular attention. The adjustment is one of the most intimate acts a yoga teacher performs — entering a student's personal space and touching their body to facilitate a deeper experience of a posture. Done with awareness, sensitivity, and genuine consent, an adjustment can be an act of profound service. Done carelessly, with insufficient attention to the student's signals, or with the teacher's agenda overriding the student's reality, an adjustment becomes a violation of Ahimsa — regardless of the teacher's technical skill or good intention. Always ask, always observe, always err on the side of less force.

## 2.3 Ahimsa Toward Oneself

One of the most neglected dimensions of Ahimsa in contemporary yoga culture is the practice of non-violence toward oneself. The wellness industry, paradoxically, has given rise to forms of self-violence that are socially sanctioned and even celebrated: pushing past pain in asana practice, following extreme dietary regimens, over-scheduling, sleep deprivation in the service of 'productivity,' and the relentless self-improvement project that treats the present self as fundamentally inadequate.

The yoga teacher who practises Ahimsa toward themselves demonstrates an extraordinarily powerful teaching by embodiment: that one can be both committed to growth and kind to oneself, that discipline and self-compassion are not opposites, and that genuine transformation arises from love rather than fear. This is one of the most counter-cultural and healing teachings you can offer in the modern world — and it must begin with your own relationship with yourself.

Practically, this means: listening to your body's signals during your own practice, resting when your body asks for rest, eating in ways that nourish rather than punish or deprive, maintaining sleep as a spiritual practice, and practising the same compassionate inner speech toward yourself that you extend to your students. Your students will model what they observe in you. If you are visibly harsh with yourself, they will internalise that as the standard. If you model genuine self-compassion alongside sincere discipline, you offer them a radical and liberating alternative.

## 2.4 Ahimsa in the Context of Yoga Teaching

As a yoga teacher rooted in Ahimsa, certain very specific responsibilities follow. You must create an environment in which every student — regardless of their body type, age, ability, background, or level of experience — feels genuinely safe, welcomed, and valued. The language of the yoga class (and of yoga marketing) has historically been saturated with subtle violence: the celebration of extreme flexibility, the use of images that represent only one body type as the 'ideal' yogi, the hierarchy of experienced practitioners over beginners, the subtle contempt for 'basic' practices.

A teacher committed to Ahimsa consciously dismantles these hierarchies. They make every class accessible without diminishing its depth. They describe every posture in terms of its internal experience rather than its external appearance. They celebrate the student who has discovered how to breathe freely in a simple forward fold with the same genuine enthusiasm as the student who has achieved an advanced arm balance. They understand that the most physically dramatic practice is not necessarily the most spiritually advanced — and that this understanding, embodied consistently, is itself one of the most important teachings they will ever offer.

## 2.5 Daily Practice of Ahimsa

- Morning reflection: sit for five minutes and ask yourself, 'In what ways might I unknowingly cause harm today?' — in thought, speech, and action.
- Speech audit: for one week, notice every instance of speech that fails the three-question test (true, kind, necessary). Record without judgment.
- Body awareness practice: during asana, bring complete attention to the line between effort and force. Learn to distinguish challenge from harm.
- Dietary awareness: reflect on how your food choices relate to Ahimsa — toward animals, toward your own body, toward the environment.
- Loving-kindness (Metta) meditation: five minutes daily, sending genuine goodwill to yourself, loved ones, neutral people, difficult people, and all beings.
- Evening review: before sleep, reflect on every interaction of the day. Where was Ahimsa present? Where was it absent? No self-punishment — only clear seeing.

## 2.6 Reflection Questions for Lesson 2

- Where in your life is non-violence most challenging to practise? Be specific.
- How does your relationship with your own body reflect or violate Ahimsa?
- What is the most violent thought pattern you notice in yourself? How long has it been present?
- Think of someone toward whom you feel persistent negative emotion. How would practising Ahimsa change your experience of them?
- As a teacher, how will you ensure that your classroom is a genuine sanctuary of non-harm?

*"The measure of a yoga teacher's advancement is not the complexity of their postures but the quality of their compassion."*

## Lesson 3

# Satya

## *The Liberating Practice of Truthfulness*

---

### ***Satya pratishthayam kriya phala ashrayatvam — Yoga Sutras 2.36***

*— When truthfulness is established, the fruits of actions become completely dependent on the practitioner's will*

### **3.1 The Nature of Truth**

Satya, the second Yama, is the practice of truthfulness — and of all the Yamas, it is perhaps the one that the modern world most urgently needs and most systematically avoids. The Sanskrit word 'Satya' is related to 'Sat,' meaning being, existence, reality. To practise Satya is therefore not merely to tell the truth as an ethical rule — it is to align oneself with the very fabric of reality, to become transparent to what is, and to refuse the comfortable but ultimately imprisoning refuge of self-deception.

Patanjali's famous statement that 'when truthfulness is established, the fruits of actions come to fruition according to the yogi's word' is frequently misunderstood as a magical formula — as if sincere truth-telling gives one supernatural power over outcomes. The deeper meaning is more subtle and more profound: when a being becomes completely aligned with truth, their words carry reality in them. What they say, happens — not because they have acquired supernatural powers, but because their speech has become a direct expression of Sat, of Being itself. There is no gap between their inner knowing and their outer expression, and therefore what they speak is already true at a level deeper than conventional reality.

For the yoga teacher, this teaching has immediate practical implications. When your teaching flows from genuine experience — from practices you have actually done, from realisations you have genuinely had, from a relationship with your own body and breath that is honest and continuous — your words carry something that mere technical instruction cannot. Students feel the difference between a teacher who is reciting what they have been taught and a teacher whose every instruction is rooted in living experience. That quality of authentic presence is the fruit of sustained Satya practice.

### **3.2 Layers of Untruth — Where We Hide**

Before we can practise Satya effectively, we need to examine with honesty the many layers at which human beings habitually relate to untruth. These are not always dramatic lies. Most of the untruth in our lives operates in far more subtle registers.

#### **The Untruth of Social Performance**

From early childhood, most of us learn to manage the impressions others form of us as a survival strategy. We present versions of ourselves calibrated to gain approval, avoid rejection, and maintain social harmony. This performance becomes so habitual that most people can barely distinguish between their performed self and their actual experience. In the yoga teaching context,

this can manifest as performing expertise you do not have, expressing certainty about aspects of the tradition you do not understand, or maintaining the facade of a 'perfect' teacher who has resolved all their inner conflicts.

The antidote is not the indiscriminate sharing of every doubt and struggle with students — that is not Satya but a different kind of performance. It is the internal commitment to know clearly what you actually know, to acknowledge what you do not know, and to allow your teaching to emerge from genuine experience rather than borrowed authority. When a student asks a question you cannot answer with confidence, Satya says: 'I don't know — let me find out for you.' This is not weakness. It is one of the most powerful things a teacher can say.

### **The Untruth of Self-Justification**

When we behave in ways that conflict with our values, the mind immediately generates a story that makes the behaviour acceptable — that justifies it, contextualises it, or attributes it to external causes. 'I was harsh with that student because they weren't listening.' 'I cancelled the class because I was tired, not because I was avoiding conflict.' 'I charged that fee because the market demands it, not because I am afraid of being seen as undervaluing myself.' These self-justifying narratives are profoundly human — and profoundly opposed to Satya.

The practice of Satya in this domain requires what the philosopher Charles Taylor called 'radical authenticity' — the willingness to look, without flinching, at the actual motivations behind our actions. This is the work of the Svadhyaya practice (which we will explore in Lesson 9), but it begins here with the simple commitment to truth: to notice when you are telling a story that flatters you, and to ask whether a more honest account is available.

### **The Untruth of Spiritual Bypass**

In yoga and spiritual communities, a particular form of untruth is especially common and especially damaging. It has been called 'spiritual bypassing' — the use of spiritual concepts, language, and practices to avoid facing uncomfortable psychological truths. 'Everything happens for a reason' can be a genuine expression of faith — or it can be a way of avoiding the anger, grief, or betrayal one actually feels. 'I am not attached to the outcome' can be a genuine expression of Vairagya — or it can be a sophisticated way of avoiding accountability.

As a yoga teacher, you will encounter spiritual bypassing in your students — and you must also be vigilant for it in yourself. The deepest Satya practice asks: in this moment, what is actually true for me, beneath all the spiritual language? What emotion is actually present? What fear is actually driving this behaviour? Yoga philosophy contains the tools to work with these realities — not to replace them with more comfortable narratives, but to see them clearly and thereby to be free of them.

## **3.3 Satya and Ahimsa — The Essential Relationship**

Patanjali places Ahimsa before Satya in the sequence of Yamas, and this ordering is significant. It establishes that truth-telling must always be filtered through the principle of non-harm. This does not mean that uncomfortable truths should be suppressed — it means that the manner, timing, and context of truth-telling should be chosen with care for the impact on the recipient.

The Mahabharata contains a famous ethical teaching on this very question. Drona asks, 'Is it ever right to speak untruth?' and the text's answer, through the character of Yudhishtira, is nuanced: an absolute truth that destroys life is morally inferior to a tactical untruth that preserves it, in extreme circumstances. However, this teaching is frequently misused to justify self-serving dishonesty. The standard for Patanjali remains the Mahavratam — the great, universal vow.

Satya is not a rule to be set aside for personal convenience; it is a way of being that, practised with increasing depth, removes the very habit of self-deception that makes harmful speech feel necessary in the first place.

### 3.4 Satya in the Yoga Teaching Relationship

The teacher-student relationship (Guru-Shishya Parampara) is one of the most sacred relationships in the yogic tradition — and one of the most vulnerable to abuse when Satya is absent. When a teacher claims authority they have not earned, attributes teachings to lineages they have not genuinely received, exaggerates their experience or qualifications, or uses the power dynamics of the teaching relationship to manipulate students, they violate Satya in its deepest sense.

Conversely, a teacher who is scrupulously honest about the source of their teachings, who credits their own teachers generously and accurately, who acknowledges the limits of their knowledge, who is transparent about the commercial aspects of their business, and who never claims spiritual authority as a substitute for genuine relationship — such a teacher embodies Satya in a way that is profoundly healing for their students and for the yoga community as a whole.

Be honest about what you know and what you do not know. Be honest about your experience and the limits of your experience. Be honest about the commercial nature of your teaching career — there is nothing spiritually inferior about charging for your services, but pretending to be motivated purely by service when you are also motivated by financial need is a violation of Satya that students can almost always feel, even when they cannot name it.

### 3.5 Daily Practice of Satya

- Truth audit: for one week, notice every instance in which you say something that is not completely true. Include exaggerations, false modesty, performance, and omissions.
- The three-question practice: before speaking, ask — is this true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? This slows the reactive mind and creates space for more truthful expression.
- Journaling: write without editing or self-censorship for ten minutes each morning. This practice gradually loosens the habit of internal performance and develops access to actual experience.
- Non-performance day: choose one day per week to practise speaking only from genuine experience. Notice every impulse to manage others' impressions of you.
- Satya meditation: sit quietly and ask, 'What is actually true for me right now?' — not what you think should be true, not what you wish were true, but what is actually present. Observe without judgment.

### 3.6 Reflection Questions for Lesson 3

- Where in your life are you most honest? Where are you least honest? What protects the dishonest areas from scrutiny?
- Identify one thing you have been telling yourself that you suspect is not completely true. What would happen if you acknowledged the deeper truth?
- How does social media affect your relationship with Satya? In what ways does it encourage performance over authenticity?
- As a yoga teacher, what truths about your practice, your knowledge, or your inner life do you avoid sharing with students? Why?

- What does it mean to be truthful with love — to speak truth in a way that neither harms nor deceives?

*"The truth does not need to be defended. It only needs to be spoken — and it will do its own work in the world."*

## Lesson 4

# Asteya & Brahmacharya

## *Non-Stealing and the Right Use of Vital Energy*

---

***Asteya pratishthayam sarva ratna upasthanam — Yoga Sutras 2.37***

*— When non-stealing is established, all jewels present themselves*

## **PART ONE: ASTEYA — The Practice of Non-Stealing**

### **4.1 Beyond the Obvious: What Asteya Actually Means**

Asteya, the third Yama, is generally translated as 'non-stealing.' At its most surface level, this means simply not taking what does not belong to you — not stealing material possessions, not taking money that has not been earned, not appropriating another's property. This level of practice, while necessary, is the beginning rather than the entirety of Asteya. The yogic understanding of stealing is vastly more comprehensive and, when fully understood, turns out to challenge nearly every human being in multiple dimensions of their daily life.

Consider: when you take credit for an idea that was not entirely yours, that is Asteya. When you take more time than allocated in a meeting, keeping others waiting, that is Asteya. When you consume more natural resources than you need, that is Asteya. When you take attention, care, or emotional energy from others without genuine reciprocity, that is Asteya. When you use your position as a teacher to claim authority over students' decision-making in areas outside your actual expertise, that is Asteya. When you copy another teacher's sequences, language, or creative work without acknowledgment, that is Asteya.

The root of all these forms of stealing, according to yogic philosophy, is a single underlying belief: the belief that there is not enough. Not enough love, not enough resources, not enough recognition, not enough security. This belief in scarcity — which is itself a form of illusion (Maya), since at the level of ultimate reality there is infinite abundance — drives the grasping, accumulating, and taking behaviours that constitute Asteya violation. The practice of Asteya is therefore, at its deepest level, the practice of cultivating trust in abundance.

### **4.2 Asteya in the Yoga Community**

The yoga community faces particular and persistent challenges in relation to Asteya. Intellectual theft — the appropriation of others' teaching material, sequences, training manuals, creative language, and original ideas without attribution — is endemic. In an age of freely shareable content, the temptation to take without acknowledgment is enormous, and the cultural norms that once governed such behaviour have eroded significantly.

As an SKM Yoga teacher, your commitment to Asteya in the professional context means: always citing the source of practices and philosophies you teach, crediting your teachers generously and accurately, never reproducing another teacher's copyrighted content without permission, and conducting your business with complete financial transparency. When you hire other teachers for

your events, pay them fairly and on time. When you partner with venue owners, honour your agreements completely.

There is also a subtler dimension of professional Asteya. A teacher who cultivates in students a sense of dependency — who subtly discourages them from studying with other teachers, who creates an atmosphere of exclusivity around their own lineage, who keeps students in a state of reliance rather than progressively empowering them toward their own practice — is stealing from their students the very thing that yoga is meant to give them: their own sovereignty. True Asteya in teaching means giving your students everything you know, acknowledging the limits of your knowledge, and celebrating their eventual independence.

### 4.3 Abundance as the Spiritual Antidote to Stealing

Patanjali's extraordinary promise — that when non-stealing is established, all jewels present themselves — points to the most profound dimension of Asteya practice. The person who is genuinely free from the need to take, who rests in an inner experience of completeness and abundance, does not need to grasp because they already feel full. And paradoxically, it is precisely this quality of inner fullness that attracts outer abundance — because people and opportunities are drawn to those who give freely from genuine generosity rather than calculating from scarcity.

The spiritual practice underlying Asteya is Aparigraha consciousness (which we will explore more fully in Lesson 5) and the cultivation of what the Upanishads call 'Purna' — fullness, completeness. In meditation, practise resting in the sense of your own completeness exactly as you are. Notice every movement of grasping or reaching in the mind. Allow each grasping movement to dissolve back into the awareness from which it arose. This is the inner practice of Asteya — and it is the foundation of genuine generosity.

## PART TWO: BRAHMACHARYA — The Right Use of Vital Energy

### *Brahmacharyam pratishthayam virya labhah — Yoga Sutras 2.38*

*— When brahmacharya is established, great vitality is obtained*

### 4.4 The Traditional Understanding of Brahmacharya

Brahmacharya is one of the most misunderstood and, in Western yoga culture, most frequently avoided of the Yamas. The word is composed of 'Brahma' (the Supreme Consciousness, or the creative force) and 'charya' (to move in, to conduct oneself according to). Literally, it means 'to move in Brahman' — to conduct one's life in alignment with the Supreme. It is traditionally translated as celibacy, but this translation, taken literally and in isolation from its fuller meaning, misses the point entirely for most practitioners and teachers.

In its traditional form, Brahmacharya was indeed a vow of complete celibacy undertaken by students during the period of their education (the Brahmacharya ashrama, the first of the four life stages). This vow was not based on a moralistic rejection of sexuality, but on the practical understanding that sexual energy (ojas) is a form of vital force that, when redirected and refined, can be channelled into the higher practices of meditation, study, and devotion. The celibate student was not repressing this energy but transforming it — a sophisticated psychophysiological practice that requires a great deal of preparation, guidance, and maturity to undertake safely.

### 4.5 Brahmacharya for the Householder Yogi

For the overwhelming majority of yoga teachers — who are householders (grhasthas) rather than celibate monastics — the relevant understanding of Brahmacharya is the wise, conscious, and respectful use of vital energy in all its forms. Vital energy (prana, ojas, tejas) is the currency of the spiritual life. It is spent in attention, in action, in emotional response, in speech, and yes, in sexual activity. The question Brahmacharya asks is not 'are you having sex?' but 'how are you relating to your energy? Are you using it wisely, reverently, and in alignment with your deepest values?'

This understanding of Brahmacharya addresses the enormous drain of vital energy that characterises modern life: the hours spent in passive, dissipative media consumption, the scattering of attention across dozens of simultaneous channels, the chronic low-grade stress that leaks energy as surely as a slowly draining battery, the sexual relationships that are driven by compulsion or unconscious habit rather than genuine presence and choice. All of these are Brahmacharya concerns.

Practically, for the yoga teacher, Brahmacharya means: managing your attention as a precious resource; maintaining clear and respectful boundaries in all relationships with students; ensuring that your sexual life (if you are a householder) is conducted with consciousness, consent, and genuine regard for the other; avoiding the drain of gossip, excessive entertainment, and reactive emotional engagement; and cultivating the deep well of vitality that makes sustained, effective teaching possible.

## 4.6 Brahmacharya and the Teacher-Student Relationship

The teacher-student relationship is, in the yogic tradition, held to be sacred. The teacher holds a position of significant trust, authority, and subtle energetic influence over students who are, at the time of receiving teaching, in a genuinely open and vulnerable state. Sexual or romantic relationships between teachers and their current students constitute one of the most serious violations of Brahmacharya and of yogic ethics more broadly. The history of the modern yoga world is unfortunately replete with examples of the harm caused by teachers who violated this boundary — causing lasting damage to individual students and to the credibility of the tradition as a whole.

Your commitment to Brahmacharya as a teacher means: maintaining clear physical and emotional boundaries with students at all times; being aware of and refusing to exploit the transference dynamics that arise in intensive teaching relationships; never using the authority of the teaching role to manipulate or coerce; and bringing the same quality of conscious respect to every interaction that you bring to your highest practice.

## 4.7 Daily Practice of Asteya and Brahmacharya

- Energy audit: track where your vital energy goes each day. Which activities energise you? Which drain you? What patterns do you notice?
- Attribution practice: for one month, consciously acknowledge the source of every idea, practice, or creative work you share. Build the habit of generous credit.
- Digital boundaries: designate specific times for digital consumption and hold to them. Notice how this practice affects your energy and clarity.
- Abundance meditation: sit with the inquiry 'What do I already have that is enough?' — in terms of knowledge, relationships, material resources, and inner qualities.
- Brahmacharya journaling: reflect on how you are using your vital energy this week. Where is it flowing freely toward your purpose? Where is it being dissipated?

## 4.8 Reflection Questions for Lessons 3 and 4

- Where in your professional life might you be unconsciously practising a subtle form of stealing — taking credit, taking time, taking attention?
- How do you relate to intellectual property in the digital age? Does your content-sharing practice embody Asteya?
- What drains your vital energy most significantly? What restores it? How might you re-engineer your daily life around this knowledge?
- How would you explain Brahmacharya to a group of modern yoga teacher training students in a way that is relevant, non-judgmental, and practically applicable?

*"The yogi who is truly established in non-stealing becomes a magnet for abundance — because they no longer push it away with the very act of grasping."*

## Lesson 5

# Aparigraha

## The Liberating Practice of Non-Possessiveness

### *Aparigraha sthairye janma kathanta sambodhah — Yoga Sutras*

#### 2.39

— When non-possessiveness is established, knowledge of the how and why of birth arises

### 5.1 The Grip of Grasping

Aparigraha — the fifth and final Yama — is in many ways the culmination of the Yama series. It addresses the most fundamental psychological habit of the unawakened human being: the compulsion to grasp, to possess, to hold, and to define oneself through what one owns, controls, and refuses to release. The word is formed from 'a' (non, without) and 'parigraha' (grasping, accumulation, hoarding). It is usually translated as non-possessiveness, non-covetousness, or non-grasping.

To practise Aparigraha is to make peace with impermanence — which is, according to both yoga philosophy and modern neuroscience, one of the most psychologically liberating practices available to the human being. The Buddha made the same observation through the teaching of Anicca (impermanence): it is not the arising of pleasant experiences that causes suffering, but the grasping at them and the refusal to allow them to pass. The yogic tradition, through Aparigraha, offers the same insight dressed in different language: freedom comes not from acquiring more but from releasing the need to hold.

Patanjali's promise is extraordinary: when non-possessiveness is established, knowledge of the how and why of one's birth arises. This is interpreted by commentators as pointing toward the direct experiential understanding of the karmic forces that shaped this particular incarnation — and ultimately toward the realisation that the individual soul is not a fixed, bounded possession but a dynamic expression of universal consciousness, temporarily identified with a particular form. This is the deepest freedom Aparigraha points toward: freedom from the identification with the limited self.

### 5.2 What We Grasp — A Complete Inventory

Most people, when they think about possessiveness, think first of material objects — money, property, possessions. But the scope of human grasping is vastly broader than the material realm. A thorough Aparigraha practice requires an honest inventory of all the dimensions at which we grasp and refuse to release.

Domain of Grasping	How It Manifests	Aparigraha Practice
Material Possessions	Hoarding, difficulty giving away, defining identity through objects	Regular giving, uncluttering, practising use without ownership
Relationships	Controlling partners, children,	Loving with open hands; celebrating

	friends; treating people as possessions	others' growth and independence
Opinions & Identity	Defending beliefs defensively; clinging to self-image	Practising 'beginner's mind'; welcoming challenge to your views
Experiences	Clinging to pleasant experiences; trying to recreate peak states	Savouring without grasping; allowing experiences to complete themselves
Status & Recognition	Needing approval; dependent on others' validation	Practising action without need for acknowledgment
Control	Micromanaging outcomes; difficulty delegating or trusting	Practising surrender; releasing need to control what is not yours to control
The Past	Replaying old grievances, regrets, or glories	Forgiveness practice; returning attention consistently to the present
The Future	Anxious planning; inability to be present without a plan	Trusting the unfolding; deepening present-moment awareness

### 5.3 Aparigraha and Material Simplicity

The most visible and immediately practicable dimension of Aparigraha is the relationship with material possessions and money. Yogic philosophy is not ascetic in the sense of promoting poverty as a virtue — the Vedic tradition celebrates Artha (prosperity) as one of the four legitimate life goals. The question is not how much you have but how you relate to what you have. Does the possession of things create a sense of security, identity, and self-worth that is dependent on those things remaining? Does the loss of material goods create proportional psychological suffering? These are the Aparigraha questions.

For the yoga teacher, the relationship with financial prosperity is particularly complex and charged. Many teachers carry deeply conditioned beliefs about money and spirituality — that charging for teaching is spiritually compromised, that genuine teachers should not be concerned with financial wellbeing, that prosperity is in tension with renunciation. These beliefs frequently mask a deeper psychological pattern: the fear of being seen to value the material, combined with a covert attachment to the security that money provides. This is not Aparigraha — it is Aparigraha performed over a subterranean layer of unexamined financial grasping.

True Aparigraha in the financial dimension of teaching means: charging fairly for the genuine value you provide, without apology or performance of poverty; receiving payment with openness and gratitude rather than guilt; managing financial resources with care and intelligence without making them the centre of your identity; and being genuinely willing to teach in reduced-fee or pro bono contexts when your financial foundation is stable enough to support it.

### 5.4 Aparigraha and Relationships — Loving With Open Hands

Perhaps the most emotionally charged dimension of Aparigraha practice is in the realm of intimate relationships — and this includes the teacher-student relationship. The controlling parent, the jealous partner, the possessive mentor — all are expressions of the fundamental misunderstanding that other people are ours to possess. They are not. Each being is a sovereign expression of consciousness, and love — genuine love — does not grasp. It opens. It creates

space for the beloved to be fully and freely themselves, even when that freedom expresses itself in ways that are disappointing, unexpected, or contrary to our preferences.

As a yoga teacher, your relationship with your students must be characterised by this open-handed love. You must genuinely want your students to outgrow their need for you. You must celebrate every student who finds their own practice, their own path, their own teacher — even if that path diverges from yours. The teacher who creates dependency, who keeps students in a state of reliance, who subtly discourages independent inquiry — such a teacher is violating Aparigraha in the teaching relationship, regardless of how sincere their affection for their students may be.

## 5.5 Aparigraha and the Yoga Teacher's Identity

One of the subtlest and most challenging dimensions of Aparigraha for yoga teachers is the relationship with professional identity. After years of training, teaching, and building a reputation, many teachers become deeply identified with their role, their credentials, their teaching style, and the image of themselves as a 'yoga teacher.' When this identity is threatened — by criticism, by changes in the yoga industry, by physical changes that affect their practice, by competition from other teachers — the response can be deeply disproportionate, because what is being threatened is not merely an external role but an internal self-concept that has been grasped as the self.

Aparigraha asks: can you hold your teacher identity lightly? Can you be a yoga teacher without needing to be a particular kind of yoga teacher? Can you teach from this body, at this age, with this level of practice, without comparing yourself to who you were or who you think you should be? Can you receive criticism of your teaching without experiencing it as an attack on your fundamental worth as a human being? These questions point toward the innermost dimension of Aparigraha: the willingness to release attachment to the story of the self.

## 5.6 Aparigraha as a Path to Liberation

The deepest teaching of Aparigraha — and the reason it occupies the final position in the sequence of Yamas — is that the ultimate object of human grasping is the ego itself. We grasp at our sense of self — at the continuous story of 'I am this particular person, with this history, these qualities, these possessions, these relationships, these beliefs' — with far more tenacity and far greater suffering than we grasp at any external object. This grasping at selfhood is, according to Patanjali, the root of all the Kleshas (afflictions) — the most fundamental form of Avidya (ignorance).

The progressive practice of Aparigraha, taken all the way, leads to the willingness to release even this most intimate grasping — and in that release, paradoxically, one does not disappear. One discovers what one actually is: not the limited story of the ego, but the vast, unbounded awareness in which that story arises and dissolves. This is Moksha — liberation. This is what the whole yogic path points toward. And it begins here, with the humble, daily, practical practice of releasing your grip on material things, on relationships, on opinions, on identity, and on outcomes.

## 5.7 Daily Practice of Aparigraha

- Decluttering practice: once a month, give away one thing you are attached to. Notice the emotional response to release.
- Identity lightening: spend one day without mentioning your title, qualifications, or achievements. Notice what arises.

- Relationship inventory: reflect on each significant relationship. Where are you grasping? Where can you allow more space and freedom?
- Outcome release: after each class or important action, consciously offer the results to the practice — release the need for a particular response or outcome.
- Impermanence meditation: sit with a beloved object, person, or experience and consciously practise seeing its impermanent nature. Allow the tenderness this evokes without grasping.
- Aparigraha journaling: complete the sentence, 'If I truly released my attachment to \_\_\_\_\_, what I might discover is \_\_\_\_\_'.

## 5.8 Reflection Questions for Lesson 5

- What are the three things you are most attached to in your life right now? How does your attachment to these things affect your state of mind?
- In what ways do you possess your yoga teaching identity? How would you relate to yourself and your work if you held that identity more lightly?
- Think of a relationship in which you tend to be possessive or controlling. What would Aparigraha ask of you in that relationship?
- Patanjali promises that knowledge of birth arises when Aparigraha is established. What might this mean in your own life and practice?
- What are you most afraid of losing? What does that fear reveal about where your sense of security and identity rests?

*"The yogi holds even their deepest spiritual experience lightly — knowing that even the peak state must pass, and that the Self which witnesses both grasping and releasing is the only thing that never comes and never goes."*

## Lesson 6

# Saucha

## *The Transformative Practice of Purity*

---

### ***Sauchat svanga jugupsa parair asamsargah — Yoga Sutras 2.40***

*— From purity comes protection of one's own body and non-contamination by others*

## **6.1 Understanding Saucha — Purity Beyond Cleanliness**

With Lesson 6 we cross the threshold from the Yamas into the Niyamas — from the ethical restraints that govern our relationship with the outer world to the personal observances that cultivate our inner life. Saucha, the first of the five Niyamas, is typically translated as purity or cleanliness. Like all the yogic principles, however, it operates simultaneously across physical, psychological, energetic, and spiritual dimensions, and the simplistic understanding of it as mere physical hygiene misses the vast depth and transformative power this practice contains.

The Sanskrit word 'Saucha' comes from the root 'shuch,' meaning to be luminous, to shine, to be bright. Purity, in the yogic sense, is not the mere absence of dirt — it is the active quality of luminosity, of transparency, of allowing the light of pure consciousness to shine through the vehicle of body, mind, and speech without obstruction. Just as a dirty window does not allow the sun's light to illuminate a room fully, an impure body, mind, or environment limits the degree to which the light of awareness can manifest in one's life and teaching.

Patanjali's two sutras on Saucha (2.40 and 2.41) are remarkable in their precision. The first describes the external effect of purity: physical purity eventually produces a kind of healthy fastidiousness about bodily things and a natural drawing away from unnecessary physical contact — not from social disconnection, but from the progressive preference for the clarity of one's own being over the energetic interference of indiscriminate contact. The second describes the internal fruit: purity of mind produces 'sattva shuddhi' (purification of the sattva), 'saumanasya' (cheerfulness, mental well-being), 'ekagrata' (one-pointedness), 'indriya-jaya' (mastery of the senses), and 'atma darshana योग्यता' (fitness for the vision of the Self).

## **6.2 Physical Saucha — The Body as Temple**

The yogic tradition has one of the most sophisticated and comprehensive systems of physical purification in the world. The Shatkarmas — the six purification practices described in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika — are a complete system of physical cleansing that addresses the nasal passages (Neti), the digestive system (Dhauti and Shankhaprakshalana), the eyes (Trataka), the abdominal organs (Nauli), and the lungs (Kapalabhati). These are not merely health practices — they are preparatory purifications designed to make the physical vehicle fit for the more subtle practices of pranayama and meditation.

For the yoga teacher, physical Saucha encompasses: daily practice of Neti to maintain clear nasal passages and support optimal pranayama; conscious, sattvic diet that supports clarity of mind and lightness of body; adequate sleep as a purification practice for the nervous system; regular engagement with nature — sun, fresh air, clean water; and the maintenance of a clean,

orderly, and aesthetically beautiful practice space. The yoga classroom itself should embody Saucha — clean mats, fresh air, an ordered altar, the faint scent of incense, a quality of spaciousness that communicates to every student's nervous system that something different and more refined is possible here.

Dietary Saucha is one of the most practically significant dimensions of this practice for teachers. The yogic texts consistently describe a sattvic diet — predominantly fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, dairy, nuts, seeds, and natural sweeteners — as the most conducive to clarity of mind, lightness of energy, and meditative depth. This does not mean that every yoga teacher must follow an identical or perfectly restrictive diet. It means developing an honest, curious, and non-dogmatic relationship with how different foods affect your energy, your mood, your practice, and your quality of presence in the teaching room.

### 6.3 Mental Saucha — Purifying the Inner Environment

Of the several dimensions of Saucha, mental purity is both the most challenging and the most consequential for the yoga teacher. The mind, according to Patanjali, is the lens through which reality is perceived. A contaminated lens — one clouded by unexamined bias, reactive emotional patterns, unconscious prejudice, accumulated resentment, or the constant chatter of self-referential thought — produces a distorted perception of students, of teaching situations, and of one's own practice. Mental Saucha is the systematic purification of this lens.

The primary practice of mental Saucha in the yogic tradition is meditation — specifically, the consistent, patient practice of observing the movements of the mind without identification. As the practitioner learns to observe thoughts, emotions, and mental patterns as objects of awareness rather than as the subject who is experiencing them, a progressive purification takes place. The turbid water of the agitated mind gradually settles, and the inherent clarity of pure awareness — which was never actually contaminated — begins to become apparent.

But meditation alone is not sufficient for mental Saucha in the full sense. Equally important is what we allow into the mind through the five senses — what we watch, listen to, read, and engage with in our daily environments. The yogic concept of 'satsanga' — keeping company with truth, with elevating people and texts and environments — is a dimension of mental Saucha that modern culture almost entirely neglects. Every teacher must ask honestly: does my media consumption support or undermine the quality of inner clarity I aspire to? This is not a call to spiritual isolation or cultural ignorance. It is a call to become conscious of how the inputs of the mind shape its quality.

### 6.4 Energetic Saucha — The Subtle Body

Beyond the physical and mental dimensions, the yogic tradition understands that the human being is also an energy body (pranamaya kosha) — a field of pranic intelligence that interpenetrates and animates the physical form. This energy body can be purified or contaminated by practices, environments, and relationships in ways that are felt but not always intellectually articulable.

Pranayama is the primary technology of energetic Saucha. The regular practice of Nadi Shodhana (Alternate Nostril Breathing) literally means 'purification of the channels' — the systematic clearing of the 72,000 nadis (subtle energy pathways) through which prana flows. When the nadis are clear, prana flows freely, the mind becomes naturally still, and the deeper practices of meditation become accessible with far less effort. When the nadis are blocked — by irregular lifestyle, inappropriate diet, emotional suppression, or insufficient practice — the experience of meditation

is frustrating and scattered, and even an asana practice that is technically accomplished lacks the quality of aliveness that characterises genuine yoga.

Environmental Saucha also belongs to this dimension. The spaces in which we live, practise, and teach carry an energetic quality that affects everyone who enters them. Regular space-clearing practices — cleaning, burning sage or incense, placing flowers, maintaining an altar, and above all filling the space with the vibration of consistent, sincere practice — are legitimate and effective dimensions of Saucha that the modern yoga world would do well to take seriously.

## 6.5 Saucha and the Yoga Teacher

For the yoga teacher, Saucha carries a professional dimension that extends beyond personal practice. You are responsible for the quality of the environment in which your students practise. This means: the physical cleanliness and organisation of your teaching space; the quality of the language you use (avoiding the mental 'pollution' of gossip, complaint, and negative speech in the teaching environment); the integrity of the energetic field you hold in the class; and the purity of your intention in offering the teaching.

The last point deserves careful reflection. Teaching yoga from an intention of genuine service — genuinely wanting each student to experience clarity, freedom, and wellbeing — creates a particular quality in the teaching that is immediately felt. Teaching from a mixed motivation that includes the need for approval, financial anxiety, ego investment in students' progress, or the performance of a spiritual identity creates a different, subtler, but equally perceptible quality. Mental Saucha applied to the motivation behind teaching is one of the most challenging and most valuable practices available to the yoga teacher.

## 6.6 Daily Practice of Saucha

- Jala Neti practice: daily nasal cleansing with a neti pot and saline solution — practise consistently for 30 days and observe the effects on your breathing and mental clarity.
- Morning ritual: begin each day with a sequence that purifies the physical body — tongue scraping, oil pulling, neti, pranayama, movement. Establish this as non-negotiable.
- Sattvic diet inquiry: for one month, eat only freshly prepared, plant-based, minimally processed food. Journal the effects on your energy, mood, and practice quality.
- Media fasting: choose one day per week to consume no social media, news, or entertainment. Observe the effect on mental clarity and creative energy.
- Space purification: once a week, thoroughly clean and rearrange your practice space. Light incense, place fresh flowers, and sit in the renewed space for ten minutes before using it.
- Saucha meditation: at the end of each day, mentally review any 'impurities' — moments of reactive speech, harmful thought, or impure intention — and offer them to the practice. This is not self-punishment but conscious purification through awareness.

## 6.7 Reflection Questions for Lesson 6

- Which dimension of Saucha — physical, mental, energetic — do you find most challenging to maintain? What gets in the way?
- How does the physical environment in which you practise and teach affect the quality of your experience? What specific changes to your environment would support more Saucha?

- Reflect on the quality of your mental diet — what you regularly read, watch, and engage with. Does it support or undermine the clarity you aspire to?
- Where in your teaching does impurity of motivation subtly show up? How would you like to purify it?
- The texts say that from Saucha comes cheerfulness (saumanasya) and fitness for the vision of the Self. Have you experienced this connection between physical/mental purity and inner clarity? Describe a specific experience.

*"The mirror does not need to be taught to reflect. It only needs to be cleaned. Saucha is the cleaning of the mirror of consciousness."*

## Lesson 7

# Santoshā

## *The Profound Practice of Contentment*

---

### ***Santoshat anuttamah sukha labhah — Yoga Sutras 2.42***

*— From contentment arises unsurpassed happiness*

## 7.1 The Radical Nature of Contentment

Santoshā — contentment — is perhaps the most countercultural of all the yogic principles in the context of 21st-century life. We live in a civilisation whose economic engine runs entirely on discontent: the perpetual stimulation of wanting more, being more, achieving more, and owning more. Advertising, social media algorithms, and much of popular psychology are devoted to the systematic cultivation of dissatisfaction — because dissatisfied people buy things, sign up for courses, seek validation, and remain perpetually engaged with the mechanisms of the consumer economy. Against this relentless cultural current, Patanjali places Santoshā — contentment — and declares that it produces 'unsurpassed happiness.' The word he uses is 'anuttama' — supreme, without superior. Not adequate happiness. Not reasonable happiness. Supreme happiness.

This is a bold claim, and it is worth examining carefully. Patanjali is not saying that contentment produces happiness by giving us what we want. He is saying that contentment is itself the highest form of happiness available to the human being — because it does not depend on any external condition. The happiness of acquisition, achievement, relationship, or approval is conditional: it depends on getting and keeping the thing that is desired. When the thing is gotten, there is momentary satisfaction — but the wanting mind immediately identifies the next object of desire, and the pursuit begins again. Santoshā breaks this cycle by discovering happiness that is unconditional — present not because of any particular circumstance, but as the natural quality of a mind that has released its quarrel with what is.

## 7.2 What Santoshā Is Not

Before exploring what Santoshā is and how to practise it, it is essential to address the most common misunderstanding: Santoshā is not passivity, not resignation, not the spiritual rationalisation of injustice or suffering, and not the abandonment of aspiration and growth. This misunderstanding causes many sincere practitioners to either reject Santoshā as spiritually self-defeating ('if I am content, I will stop growing') or to misuse it as a spiritual bypass ('everything is perfect as it is' — used to avoid addressing real problems).

Santoshā is a quality of the heart in this present moment, not a philosophical position about what should or should not change. The parent who is genuinely content in the moment can also, in the same moment, be committed to their child's growth and education. The activist who practises Santoshā can be fully engaged in working for justice while not being tormented by the current state of injustice in the world. The yoga teacher who practises Santoshā enjoys their practice as it is today while continuing to train, study, and develop their skills with genuine enthusiasm. The

key distinction is between striving driven by fundamental dissatisfaction with oneself versus aspiration flowing from a sense of abundance and genuine love for the practice.

### 7.3 The Roots of Discontent

To understand Santosha as a practice, we must understand what we are actually practising against — the deep-rooted tendencies of the mind that generate discontent in the absence of deliberate cultivation of its opposite.

#### Comparison (Spardha)

The comparison mind is one of the most pervasive sources of discontent. We compare our bodies, our practices, our achievements, our relationships, our teaching success, and our spiritual development with those of others — and almost invariably, the comparison is unfavourable. This is not accidental: the comparison mind is specifically designed to motivate by generating dissatisfaction. The problem is that it generates dissatisfaction regardless of objective reality. The most accomplished teachers can be tormented by comparison with those they perceive as more advanced, more popular, or more enlightened. Santosha practice requires the deliberate and consistent interruption of the comparison habit — not through denial, but through the recognition that every comparison is based on a fundamental error: the belief that you are lacking something that another has, when in reality each being is a unique and complete expression of consciousness.

#### Regretting the Past, Worrying About the Future

Another major root of discontent is the mind's habitual displacement from the present moment — either into the past (replaying what should have been different) or into the future (anticipating what might go wrong or planning for a happiness that will arrive when conditions are finally right). In either case, the present moment — which is the only place where happiness is actually possible — is evacuated. Santosha is fundamentally a present-moment practice. It is the choice to find something to be genuinely at peace with, and genuinely grateful for, right here and right now, before looking anywhere else.

#### The Hedonic Treadmill

Modern psychology has a name for the phenomenon Patanjali was pointing at: the hedonic adaptation treadmill — the well-documented tendency for human beings to return to a relatively stable level of happiness shortly after both positive and negative life changes. Lottery winners return to their previous baseline happiness within months. The new relationship, new achievement, or new possession provides a temporary boost, then the wanting mind recalibrates and is looking for the next thing. Santosha, as a deliberate and sustained practice, intervenes in this cycle by asking: what if the happiness I am seeking is not in the next acquisition or achievement but already present, beneath the noise of the seeking mind?

### 7.4 Santosha in Practice — Daily Life

Santosha is practised in the midst of daily life — not in ideally favourable conditions, but precisely in the friction, the disappointment, the tedium, and the inconvenience of ordinary experience. The retreat from difficult conditions is not Santosha — it is avoidance. Santosha is developed in traffic, in illness, in criticism, in financial difficulty, in the imperfect class you just taught, in the student who doesn't seem to be listening, in the body that aches and declines.

The classical practice is to meet each experience — pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral — with the same quality of receptive openness, without rejecting the unpleasant or grasping at the pleasant. This does not mean pretending that unpleasant things are not unpleasant. It means meeting them without adding the second arrow: the layer of resistance, resentment, and suffering that we add to difficulty through our insistence that it should not be happening. In the famous Buddhist metaphor, the first arrow is the actual painful event — the illness, the failure, the criticism. The second arrow is what we do to ourselves with our thoughts, judgments, and resistance: 'this shouldn't be happening,' 'I always get this,' 'I am a failure,' 'everything is against me.' Santosha practice is the withdrawal of the second arrow.

## 7.5 Santosha and the Yoga Teacher

The yoga teaching profession is remarkably fertile ground for Santosha practice — because it offers an extraordinarily rich variety of experiences that challenge contentment. The class where only three people show up after you spent hours preparing. The advanced student whose extraordinary progress makes you question your own. The chronic pain that limits your demonstration capacity. The negative review, the unresponsive student, the venue that let you down, the retreat that filled only half. The successful teacher in your town who seems to grow effortlessly while you struggle.

Each of these experiences is an invitation to practise Santosha. Not to pretend they don't hurt or matter. But to practise returning, again and again, to the ground of contentment beneath the fluctuations — to the recognition that your value as a teacher and as a human being is not dependent on any external measure of success. The teaching that flows from this ground of contentment is qualitatively different from the teaching that flows from anxiety, comparison, and the need for validation. Students feel it, even when they cannot name it. Contentment is contagious.

## 7.6 Gratitude as the Practice Vehicle of Santosha

Of all the practical tools available for the cultivation of Santosha, gratitude practice is the most well-researched, most immediately accessible, and most consistently effective. Genuine gratitude — not the performative positivity of toxic optimism, but the sincere, specific recognition of what is actually good and beautiful in one's present experience — produces measurable neurological changes in the brain, shifting activity from the threat-detection circuits of the amygdala to the prefrontal cortex, where equanimity and clear thinking are centred.

The yogic gratitude practice goes further than its modern psychological counterpart. It extends gratitude not only to pleasant experiences but to difficult ones — recognising that the challenge of the demanding student, the humbling failure, the limiting illness, are also teachers offering precisely what is needed for growth. This does not mean pretending that suffering is not suffering. It means holding the possibility that even the most challenging experiences are serving the larger unfolding of consciousness — and meeting them with the same reverence one extends to obviously beautiful experiences.

## 7.7 Daily Practice of Santosha

- Morning Santosha: upon waking, before the mind begins its list of problems and tasks, spend five minutes in deliberate appreciation of what is already present and good. Be specific.

- Gratitude journal: every evening, write three specific things you are genuinely grateful for from that day. Avoid generic statements. Find the specific, the ordinary, the easily overlooked.
- Comparison interruption: when you notice the comparison mind at work, gently return attention to your own experience with the inquiry: 'What is actually true about my own situation right now, beyond the comparison?'
- Santosha asana practice: in your next asana session, practise the postures entirely without ambition — not working toward a peak pose, not trying to improve. Simply experience what is already there.
- Daily contentment inquiry: at some point each day, pause and ask yourself, 'What, in this moment, is already enough?' Let the question settle without forcing an answer.
- Difficult experience practice: when something goes wrong or falls below expectation, practise the 'second arrow' removal. Allow the first arrow (the actual difficulty) to be there, and consciously withdraw the second (the resistance, the story, the self-judgment).

## 7.8 Reflection Questions for Lesson 7

- Identify the three areas of your life in which you most consistently feel discontent. What story does the mind tell in these areas? Is the story true?
- Reflect on a time when you were genuinely, deeply content. What were the conditions? What made it possible? Was it dependent on external circumstances?
- Where in your yoga teaching practice do you most clearly experience the opposite of Santosha — the anxious striving, the comparison, the sense of not-enoughness? What practice might address this specifically?
- Patanjali says contentment produces 'unsurpassed happiness.' Have you experienced moments in which complete acceptance of what is produced a quality of joy that seeking could not produce? Describe it.
- How would you teach Santosha to a student who confuses it with giving up or settling? What language would you use?

*"The one who can find the great peace in this moment, exactly as it is, has found the greatest treasure in the universe. For that peace does not depend on anything that can be taken away."*

## Lesson 8

# Tapas

## *The Purifying Fire of Disciplined Practice*

---

### ***Kayendriya siddhir ashuddhi kshayat tapasah — Yoga Sutras 2.43***

*— Through the burning away of impurities by Tapas, the body and senses attain perfection*

### **8.1 The Sacred Fire of Tapas**

Tapas is the third Niyama and, in terms of its transformative power in the day-to-day life of the practitioner, it is arguably the most practically significant. The word 'Tapas' comes from the Sanskrit root 'tap' — to heat, to burn, to shine. In the most ancient Vedic literature, Tapas refers to the austerities practised by sages — extreme physical disciplines of heat, cold, fasting, silence, and prolonged immobility — designed to burn away the accumulated karmic residue (samskaras) that obscures the light of pure consciousness.

For the contemporary practitioner and yoga teacher, however, Tapas does not necessarily require extreme physical austerity. Patanjali uses the word in a broader and more nuanced sense: it refers to the disciplined, consistent application of effort in the direction of practice and purification — the willingness to do what is difficult, uncomfortable, and counter to the habitual tendencies of the mind and body, in service of a larger purpose. In this sense, Tapas is the internal fire that makes all genuine transformation possible.

Without Tapas, the spiritual path remains in the realm of inspiration and intention. It is Tapas — the actual doing of the practice on days when you don't feel like it, the commitment to truth when comfort beckons, the maintenance of your sadhana when travel and busyness make it inconvenient, the willingness to hold discomfort in asana or meditation rather than immediately escaping it — that converts the map of yoga philosophy into the actual territory of lived transformation.

### **8.2 Three Forms of Tapas — Body, Speech, and Mind**

The Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 17, verses 14-16) offers one of the most complete classical descriptions of Tapas, dividing it into three essential forms corresponding to the three instruments of human action:

#### **Tapas of the Body (Sharira Tapas)**

Physical tapas includes: reverence for the Divine, the teachers, and the wise; cleanliness (Saucha); straightforwardness; celibacy or right use of energy (Brahmacharya); and non-violence. It also encompasses the physical discipline of consistent asana practice, pranayama, and the maintenance of a lifestyle that keeps the body as a refined and responsive instrument of practice. For the yoga teacher, the most relevant dimension of physical tapas is the consistency of your personal practice. Not practice when you feel inspired, but practice as a non-negotiable commitment — the fire that keeps burning regardless of mood, energy level, or circumstance.

## Tapas of Speech (Vak Tapas)

The tapas of speech encompasses: speech that does not agitate others, is truthful, pleasant, and beneficial; the regular practice of scriptural recitation and chanting; and the discipline of Mauna — deliberate silence. Of all the forms of Tapas, speech tapas is perhaps the most immediately available and most immediately transformative. The quantity of energy consumed by undisciplined, reactive, complaint-laden, or gossip-driven speech is extraordinary. The yogi who practises speech tapas discovers, sometimes with great surprise, that the reduction of unnecessary speech creates an immediate increase in inner clarity, vital energy, and meditative depth.

For the yoga teacher, this has direct professional implications. The quality of your verbal instruction — its precision, its warmth, its appropriate use of silence, its freedom from unnecessary filler, its genuine attunement to the students' experience — is a direct expression of your speech tapas. Every unnecessary word is a dissipation of the energetic field of the class. Every well-placed silence is an invitation for deeper experience. Learn the discipline of speaking less and meaning more.

## Tapas of Mind (Manas Tapas)

Mental tapas is the most subtle and most far-reaching of the three forms. It includes: serenity, kindness, silence of heart, self-control, and purity of intention. It is the discipline of working with the mind itself — the consistent practice of returning attention from distraction to presence, from reactivity to response, from self-referential rumination to open, clear awareness. This is, at its root, the practice of meditation — and Patanjali identifies it as a form of Tapas precisely because it requires genuine discipline, especially in the early stages when the mind's habitual preference for distraction is very strong.

The tapas of mind also includes the willingness to work with difficult psychological material — to not turn away from one's fear, grief, shame, or confusion, but to hold these experiences in the heat of conscious awareness until their energy is liberated and transformed. This is inner work of the highest order, and it is the tapas that makes a yoga teacher genuinely capable of holding space for others' transformation — because they have done the work in themselves.

## 8.3 Tapas and Sattva — The Golden Mean

The Bhagavad Gita's teaching on Tapas includes an important warning about the degeneration of tapas into its negative forms. Krishna distinguishes three qualities of tapas corresponding to the three gunas:

Sattvic Tapas (the highest) is performed with clarity of purpose, steadiness, and without desire for fruits or show — it is tapas engaged in purely for the liberation and purification it produces, not for the spiritual status it confers.

Rajasic Tapas is performed with desire for status, power, respect, or outer benefit — the performance of austerity for show, for the admiration of others, or for the accumulation of spiritual merit as a kind of bargaining chip.

Tamasic Tapas involves foolish, destructive, or degrading austerities — self-harm, extreme deprivation beyond what the practice actually requires, or discipline applied not from genuine inner commitment but from self-loathing, compulsion, or ignorance.

As a yoga teacher, you will encounter all three qualities of tapas in your students — and you must be vigilant for all three in yourself. The person who pushes past clear pain signals in asana because they believe suffering equals progress is practising tamasic tapas. The teacher who maintains an unrealistically rigorous public practice schedule for the sake of their social media

following is practising rajasic tapas. Sattvic tapas is the fire that burns steadily, without drama, in the service of genuine clarity and freedom.

## 8.4 Tapas in the Modern Yoga Teaching Life

The yoga teaching profession requires an unusual degree of tapas to sustain at the highest level. Early morning classes demand waking before dawn when the body prefers sleep — tapas. Consistent preparation for each class, even after years of experience when it would be easy to rely on habit — tapas. Maintaining personal practice through periods of teaching fatigue — tapas. Continuing to study and learn when you already know enough to get by — tapas. Taking honest feedback and criticism without defensive reaction — tapas. Maintaining ethical boundaries with difficult students or commercial pressures — tapas.

None of these forms of tapas are dramatic. None of them will appear on Instagram. None of them will be celebrated by anyone but the most discerning students who feel the quality of presence and preparation that tapas produces. But they are the substance of a teaching life that deepens, rather than declines, with time.

The most important tapas for the yoga teacher, in Dr. Shivam Mishra's experience, is the maintenance of personal practice regardless of circumstance. Every morning, before the day makes its demands, sit on the mat. Not to produce an advanced demonstration. Not to prepare a sequence. Not to achieve anything at all. Sit on the mat and practise. Some days the practice will be extraordinary. Most days it will be ordinary. The extraordinary and the ordinary days are equally important — because it is the continuity, the showing up, that builds the inner fire that makes everything else possible.

## 8.5 Practical Tapas — The 40-Day Sadhana

One of the most powerful structures for cultivating Tapas is the traditional 40-day practice commitment — a specific, identified practice undertaken without interruption for forty days. The number 40 is significant across multiple traditions, appearing in the forty days of Christ's desert ordeal, Moses's forty days on Mount Sinai, the forty-day period of Arba'een in Islam, and the classical Vedic understanding of forty days as the minimum period required to establish a new neural and energetic pattern.

Choose a specific daily practice: a particular pranayama sequence, a particular mantra, a specific form of selfless service, or a specific meditation technique. Commit to performing it without exception for forty days. If you miss a day, begin again from day one. The power of this practice lies not in the individual sessions but in the integrity of the commitment itself — the inner strengthening that comes from doing what you said you would do, day after day, regardless of circumstance.

## 8.6 Daily Practice of Tapas

- Sadhana consistency: establish a minimum daily practice of 20 minutes — non-negotiable. Keep this commitment for 30 days without exception before evaluating or changing it.
- Cold water practice: begin each day with thirty seconds of cold water exposure (shower or immersion). This is a mild but immediately effective physical tapas that builds willingness to engage discomfort.

- Speech tapas: choose one week in which you speak only when what you are about to say passes the test — true, necessary, and kind. Maintain Mauna (silence) for one hour each evening.
- One uncomfortable conversation: each week, have one conversation you have been avoiding — a truth you have been withholding, a boundary you have been failing to maintain, a gratitude you have been holding back.
- Practice when you don't want to: notice the days when every cell of your being resists the mat, the meditation cushion, or the preparation work. Those are the days your Tapas is being built most powerfully. Show up anyway.

## 8.7 Reflection Questions for Lesson 8

- What is the area of your life where you most consistently avoid the discomfort that genuine growth requires? What is the tapas that would address this?
- Identify a sattvic tapas practice you could commit to for forty days. What would be the challenges? What would be the fruits?
- Reflect on the three forms of tapas — body, speech, and mind. Which is most developed in you? Which most needs development?
- Where have you experienced the transformative fruit of tapas — a sustained discipline that produced real, lasting change? What did that experience teach you?
- How do you distinguish between sattvic tapas (purifying discipline) and tamasic tapas (harmful self-punishment) in your own practice and in your students' practices?

*"The fire of Tapas does not destroy the yogi. It destroys the false self that the yogi has mistaken for who they are. What remains after the burning is pure gold."*

## Lesson 9

# Svadhyaaya

## *The Illuminating Practice of Self-Study*

### ***Svadhyaayat ishta devata samprayogah — Yoga Sutras 2.44***

*— Through self-study, union with one's chosen deity is achieved*

#### **9.1 The Double Meaning of Svadhyaaya**

Svadhyaaya, the fourth Niyama, carries within it a beautiful and profound double meaning that the English translation 'self-study' only partially captures. The word is composed of 'sva' (self, one's own) and 'adhyaya' (lesson, study, going into). It means, simultaneously, the study of sacred texts and scriptures (because through genuine engagement with the wisdom of the tradition, one studies the universal dimensions of the Self) and the direct study of oneself — the courageous, honest, sustained inquiry into one's own nature: thoughts, patterns, motivations, unconscious beliefs, and the witness that observes all of these.

This dual meaning is not accidental — it reflects the yogic understanding that the individual self (jiva) and the universal Self (Atman-Brahman) are ultimately not two different things. The study of the great scriptures and the honest study of one's own experience, pursued with sufficient depth and sincerity, converge on the same realisation: the awareness that is reading these words right now, the awareness that is having every thought and feeling and sensation in your experience, is not separate from the awareness that the Upanishads call Brahman, that the Gita calls the Supreme Self, that the Yoga Sutras call Purusha. Svadhyaaya is the practice that makes this not a concept but a lived discovery.

#### **9.2 Svadhyaaya as Scriptural Study**

The yogic tradition is blessed with one of the richest bodies of spiritual literature in the world. The Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, the Shiva Samhita, the Shrimad Bhagavatam, the works of Sri Ramana Maharshi, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, J. Krishnamurti, Swami Sivananda — these texts are not relics of a dead past. They are living transmissions of insights arrived at through direct experience, preserved across millennia because the insights themselves are perennially relevant.

The practice of scriptural Svadhyaaya is not the same as academic study of religion. It does not seek to classify, compare, or critique the texts from a scholarly distance. It seeks to extract from them what Swami Chinmayananda called 'the living nectar' — the direct experiential guidance that speaks to this practitioner, in this moment, on this particular edge of their inner growth. The criterion for a good Svadhyaaya session is not how much information has been absorbed but how precisely the text has pointed toward something the practitioner recognises as true in their own experience.

#### **Recommended Core Texts for YTT Students**

Text	Primary Teaching	How to Study
------	------------------	--------------

Yoga Sutras of Patanjali	Complete map of the yogic path	Study one sutra per day with commentary. Return to each sutra multiple times as your practice deepens.
Bhagavad Gita	Dharma, Karma, Bhakti, Jnana Yoga	Read slowly. Apply each teaching to your current life situation. Do not rush.
Hatha Yoga Pradipika	Classical asana and pranayama	Read alongside your physical practice. Let the text inform your bodily experience.
Upanishads (selected)	Nature of the Self (Atman-Brahman)	Sit with a single verse in meditation. Allow it to resonate beyond intellectual understanding.
Sri Ramana Maharshi — Who Am I?	Direct inquiry into the Self	Read one paragraph. Sit with the inquiry it evokes for 20 minutes. Return to the text.

### 9.3 Svadhyaya as Self-Inquiry — Knowing Thyself

The second and in some ways more demanding dimension of Svadhyaya is the direct inquiry into one's own nature. This is the practice that the Vedantic tradition calls 'Atma Vichara' — inquiry into the Self — and that appears in the Delphic oracle's injunction 'Know Thyself,' in Socrates' 'The unexamined life is not worth living,' and in the modern therapeutic traditions as various forms of introspection, shadow work, and psychological self-inquiry.

For the yoga teacher in training, Svadhyaya as self-inquiry has several practically important dimensions:

#### Observing the Patterns of the Mind

The most accessible entry point into self-inquiry is the consistent observation of one's own mental patterns. What are the habitual thoughts that arise repeatedly? What are the emotional reactions that are triggered by particular circumstances? What are the deep beliefs about oneself and the world that seem self-evident but, upon examination, turn out to be assumptions adopted in childhood or carried from past experience? Journaling, meditation, and honest dialogue with a trusted mentor or senior teacher are the primary tools of this investigation.

As a yoga teacher, this aspect of Svadhyaya is not optional — it is professional responsibility. The patterns you have not examined in yourself will inevitably appear in your teaching, your relationships with students, and the subtle energetic quality of your classes. The teacher who has not worked with their own anger will unconsciously replicate it in demanding students to push past their limits. The teacher who has not worked with their own need for approval will unconsciously cultivate student dependency. The teacher who has not examined their relationship with their own body will unconsciously communicate their body image issues to students who are vulnerable to them.

#### The Practice of Witness Consciousness

Beyond the examination of specific patterns lies the deeper practice of Svadhyaya as the cultivation of Sakshi Bhava — the quality of being the witness rather than the identified experiencer. In meditation, this practice involves learning to observe thoughts, emotions, sensations, and perceptions as objects appearing within awareness, rather than experiences happening to a subject who is their content.

This shift from subject to witness is the subtlest and most transformative dimension of Svadhyaya. As the practitioner becomes increasingly established in witness consciousness, the identification with the fluctuating contents of experience gradually loosens, and the presence of something unchanging, luminous, and free beneath all the movement begins to become apparent. This is the 'union with one's chosen deity' that Patanjali describes as the fruit of Svadhyaya — not the appearance of a deity in meditation, but the direct recognition of the divine Self as one's own innermost nature.

## 9.4 Journaling as a Svadhyaya Practice

Journaling is, for the yoga teacher, one of the most accessible, most flexible, and most powerful tools of Svadhyaya practice available. Unlike the formal structure of meditation, journaling allows the mind to move freely — to follow the threads of inquiry wherever they lead, to encounter unexpected insights, and to gradually build a map of the inner landscape that becomes invaluable in understanding oneself and in teaching others.

The most effective journaling for Svadhyaya is not the journaling of daily events — it is the journaling of inner inquiry. Begin with a question or observation from your practice, your reading, or your teaching experience. Write without stopping, without editing, and without judgment for a set period — ten to twenty minutes. Do not reread immediately. After a week, reread the entries with fresh eyes, noting patterns, themes, and recurring questions.

Over time, this practice produces a depth of self-knowledge that is genuinely extraordinary — and directly supports the quality of teaching, because the teacher who knows themselves well is vastly more equipped to understand, support, and guide others through the terrain of their own inner lives.

## 9.5 Svadhyaya and the Yoga Lineage

Svadhyaya also includes the diligent and grateful study of one's own teaching lineage. For SKM Yoga students, this means deepening your study of the foundational texts and practices that have been transmitted through the lineage, understanding the philosophical and practical frameworks that distinguish this approach, and taking responsibility for the continuation of the transmission through the integrity and depth of your own practice and teaching.

A teacher who does not know their lineage deeply is like a river that has forgotten its source — still flowing, but gradually losing the depth and clarity that gave it its character. Study your lineage. Know the texts. Know the key teachers. Know the philosophical framework. Know the practices well enough to teach them from genuine understanding rather than memorisation. This is both Svadhyaya and seva — study as service to the tradition.

## 9.6 Daily Practice of Svadhyaya

- Daily scripture study: fifteen minutes of contemplative reading from a classical yoga text — not speed-reading for information, but slow, meditative absorption.
- Morning inquiry meditation: begin each meditation with the question 'Who is aware of this experience?' or 'What is the nature of the one who is meditating?' Allow the question to open rather than forcing an answer.
- Evening journaling: write responses to one of the reflection questions from this book, or create your own inquiry question from the day's experience.

- Pattern tracking: for two weeks, track one identified mental pattern — an emotional reaction, a habitual thought, or a recurring belief. Notice its frequency, its triggers, and its quality, without trying to change it. Observation itself is the beginning of transformation.
- Teaching debrief Svadhyaya: after each class, write ten minutes of honest reflection: what was teaching from genuine presence? What was teaching from habit or performance? What in your students' responses revealed something about yourself?

## 9.7 Reflection Questions for Lesson 9

- What scriptural text has most deeply influenced your understanding of yoga and of yourself? What is the specific insight from that text that has been most transformative?
- What is the psychological pattern in yourself that you are most aware of — and most consistently challenged by — in your teaching? How long have you been aware of it?
- Svadhyaya is said to produce 'union with one's chosen deity.' What does this mean to you? How does your own inner inquiry connect with your sense of the sacred?
- Reflect on your relationship with self-knowledge. Are you genuinely curious about your own nature, or does deeper self-inquiry feel threatening? What might that response itself reveal?
- What question about your own nature, if you could answer it fully, would most change the quality of your teaching and your life?

*"The deepest scripture is the text of your own experience. Every moment is a verse. Every breath is a teaching. Svadhyaya is learning to read your own life with the same reverence you bring to the most sacred text."*

## Lesson 10

# Ishvara Pranidhana

*The Ultimate Practice — Surrender to the Supreme*

---

## ***Samadhi siddhir ishvara pranidhanat — Yoga Sutras 2.45***

*— From surrender to Ishvara, Samadhi is perfected*

### 10.1 The Crown of the Niyamas

Ishvara Pranidhana — surrender to the Supreme — is the fifth and final Niyama, and it occupies the culminating position in the sequence of ethical and personal observances for the same reason that Aparigraha occupies the culminating position among the Yamas: both point toward the dissolution of the most fundamental illusion of the ego — the belief in separation, in being a self-sufficient, independent entity that is the sole author of its own journey.

The word 'Ishvara' is one of the most profound and deliberately chosen terms in the entire Yoga Sutras. Patanjali uses this term rather than the more religiously loaded terms like Brahma, Vishnu, or Shiva, because he is not pointing toward any particular deity of the Hindu pantheon — he is pointing toward a precise philosophical category: the 'special Purusha,' the unlimited, unconditioned consciousness that is not subject to the Kleshas (afflictions), not bound by karma, and not limited by time. Whether this is understood as a personal God, as universal consciousness, as the deepest nature of the Self, or as the intelligence that pervades all things — the practice of surrender is the same.

'Pranidhana' means placing down, offering, deep devotion, total surrender. Ishvara Pranidhana is therefore the act of placing the entire weight of one's self — one's actions, their fruits, one's practice, one's teaching, one's life — at the feet of this ultimate reality. It is the dissolution of the illusion that 'I am doing this.' It is the recognition that the intelligence that beats the heart, that orchestrates the extraordinary complexity of the universe, that speaks through the tradition of yoga across millennia — is not separate from the intelligence that moves the hand holding this book.

### 10.2 Ishvara Pranidhana in the Yoga Sutras — The Complete Picture

It is significant that Ishvara Pranidhana appears three times in the Yoga Sutras, not once. It appears first in Sutra 1.23 as an alternative path to Samadhi — suggesting that for those whose nature is devotional rather than analytical, surrender to Ishvara is a complete spiritual path in itself. It appears again as part of Kriya Yoga (the yoga of action) in Sutra 2.1 alongside Tapas and Svadhyaya — indicating that it is not a passive or indolent practice but one embedded in the active practice of discipline and self-inquiry. And it appears here in Sutra 2.45 as the final Niyama — the completion of the entire structure of personal observances.

This threefold appearance communicates something important: Ishvara Pranidhana is not one technique among many, to be practised for a while and then replaced with something more advanced. It is a quality of relationship with life itself that deepens indefinitely — that begins, in

the early stages of practice, as a deliberate act of devotion and surrender, and gradually, as the practice matures, becomes the natural atmosphere of the practitioner's entire life. The advanced yogi does not need to practise surrender. They have become surrender.

### 10.3 The Obstacle of the Ego — Why Surrender Is So Difficult

If Ishvara Pranidhana is the path to Samadhi — the highest state of yoga — one might reasonably ask why it is not simply practised from the beginning and why the preceding nine Yamas and Niyamas are needed at all. The answer lies in understanding the nature of the ego and why genuine surrender is the most demanding practice in the entire yogic repertoire.

The ego — the sense of being a separate, bounded self — is not merely a philosophical error. It is a survival mechanism, embedded in the human nervous system through millions of years of biological evolution, that is deeply identified with control, with self-protection, and with the maintenance of its own continuity. To genuinely surrender this sense of control — not as a philosophical statement or a spiritual performance, but as a lived reality in which the ego genuinely allows its grip to loosen — is experienced by the nervous system as a form of death. Not metaphorical death, but the actual dissolution of the sense of being a separate self. This is why genuine Ishvara Pranidhana is profoundly rare and profoundly transformative.

The preceding eight Yamas and Niyamas prepare the practitioner for this surrender by systematically dissolving the specific habits and illusions that keep the ego's grip tightly maintained. Ahimsa softens the defensive hardness of the self. Satya dissolves the comfortable illusions of self-deception. Asteya releases the sense of scarcity that makes grasping feel necessary. Brahmacharya reclaims the vital energy that has been scattered in distraction. Aparigraha loosens the grip on possessions, identity, and outcome. Saucha purifies the vehicle that carries the light of surrender. Santosha creates the inner stability from which surrender is possible without it feeling like defeat. Tapas builds the capacity to remain in the discomfort of not-knowing and not-controlling. Svadhyaya illuminates the exact nature of the self that must ultimately be surrendered. And then — finally — Ishvara Pranidhana becomes possible in the full sense.

### 10.4 Forms of Surrender Practice

#### Karma Yoga — Offering the Fruits of Action

The most immediately accessible form of Ishvara Pranidhana for the yoga teacher is the practice taught by Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita as Karma Yoga — performing every action with full engagement and full quality, while deliberately releasing attachment to the outcome. This is not indifference to results. It is the recognition that the results of our actions depend on a vast web of causes and conditions that extend infinitely beyond our personal control, and that our responsibility ends at the quality of our effort and the purity of our intention.

For the yoga teacher, this means: teach every class as if it is the most important class you will ever teach, with full presence and genuine care — and then release the need for a particular response from students, a particular size of class, a particular level of appreciation or revenue. The offering is the act of teaching itself, made complete in the moment of offering, regardless of what follows. This practice, sustained over years, produces a remarkable quality of freedom in the teaching relationship — a lightness that students feel as safety, as invitation, as genuine presence uncontaminated by the teacher's need.

#### Bhakti Yoga — The Path of Devotion

For those whose nature is devotional, Bhakti Yoga — the yoga of love and devotion — is the most direct expression of Ishvara Pranidhana. Bhakti practice transforms the ordinary activities of life into acts of worship: the morning practice becomes an offering to the Divine, the teaching becomes service to Ishvara in the form of each student, the challenges of the day become gifts from a beloved teacher who is asking you to grow. When the Bhakti orientation is genuine — when it flows from a living experience of love for the ultimate reality rather than from a performance of devotion — it is one of the most rapid and complete paths to the dissolution of ego-identification available.

In practical terms, Bhakti Yoga for the yoga teacher includes: maintaining an altar in your home and teaching space with genuine devotion; regular chanting, kirtan, or mantra practice; reading devotional literature (the Bhagavatam, the poetry of Mirabai, Kabir, Rumi, or Tukaram); and practising the simple but radical shift of seeing every student as an expression of the Divine — literally, physically, directly, not metaphorically.

### **Surrender of Results — The Daily Practice**

Perhaps the most immediately practical dimension of Ishvara Pranidhana is the simple daily act of beginning each practice, each class, and each conversation with a brief, sincere offering of what is about to happen to something larger than yourself. This does not require elaborate ritual or particular religious belief. It requires only a moment of honest acknowledgment: 'I did not create this practice tradition. I did not manufacture my capacity to teach. I do not control what these students will take from this hour. I am a channel for something larger than my individual understanding, and I offer this hour in service of that larger purpose.' This moment of genuine surrender is a practice of Ishvara Pranidhana — and its cumulative effect, over years of consistent practice, is extraordinary.

## **10.5 Ishvara Pranidhana and the Question of God**

The question inevitably arises: does Ishvara Pranidhana require belief in God? Patanjali's treatment of Ishvara in the Yoga Sutras is notably non-dogmatic and non-sectarian. He does not require the practitioner to adopt any particular theological belief. What he does require is a genuine willingness to orient one's practice toward something larger than the ego — something that transcends the personal agenda of the individual self. Whether this is understood as God, as universal consciousness, as the intelligence inherent in nature, as the tradition of yoga itself, as the ground of pure awareness — the essential practice of surrender is the same.

What is not acceptable, in the context of authentic Ishvara Pranidhana, is the reduction of this practice to a performance of belief that has no actual effect on the quality of self-identification. The yoga teacher who says all the right words about surrender and service while operating their teaching career entirely from ego motivation, financial anxiety, competitive ambition, and the need for approval — such a teacher has understood Ishvara Pranidhana as an idea rather than as a practice. Ideas do not produce Samadhi. Practice does.

## **10.6 The Integration of Yama and Niyama — Where It All Leads**

As we reach the end of this ten-lesson journey through Yama and Niyama, it is worth pausing to appreciate the extraordinary completeness and wisdom of the structure Patanjali has offered us. These ten principles are not a random collection of ethical recommendations. They form a complete and progressive curriculum of human transformation — a structured path from the ordinary condition of ego-identified, suffering human experience to the extraordinary possibility of genuine freedom.

The five Yamas purify the field of external conduct — removing the sources of harm, dishonesty, violation, dissipation, and grasping that contaminate one's relationships with the world and other beings. The five Niyamas build the positive qualities of the inner life — purity, contentment, discipline, self-knowledge, and surrender — that together create the inner environment in which the deeper practices of asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and Samadhi become possible and effective.

Together, Yama and Niyama constitute what might be called the 'complete ethical and personal curriculum of yoga.' They do not need to be perfected before beginning the other practices — they are developed simultaneously with the other practices, each dimension supporting and deepening the others. But they must be genuinely engaged with — not bypassed, not intellectualised away, not reduced to a brief overview in the first week of teacher training and never returned to. They are the continuous, living foundation of the entire path.

## 10.7 A Final Word on Teaching Yama and Niyama

As you prepare to carry these teachings to your own students, remember: the most powerful teaching of Yama and Niyama is not in the words you speak but in the life you live. Your students will not remember the definitions you provide or the Sanskrit terms you correctly pronounce. They will remember how they felt in your presence. They will remember whether you seemed genuinely at peace, genuinely kind, genuinely honest, and genuinely interested in their wellbeing without attachment to their gratitude. They will model, at some cellular level, the quality of being that they encounter in you — and that quality of being is the fruit of these ten principles, lived sincerely over years.

Begin today. Not tomorrow, not after training is complete, not after you have become a 'better person.' Begin today with exactly the practice that feels most alive and most challenging in this moment. Choose one principle. Sit with it for a week. Apply it specifically, concretely, and without dramatic expectations. Notice what happens. Trust the process that ten thousand years of yogic wisdom has refined into the extraordinary gift these teachings represent.

You are standing in the unbroken stream of a tradition that flows from the earliest Vedic seers, through the great sages and teachers, through your own teachers, to you — and through you, to the students who will one day be grateful that they found you.

Carry it with integrity. Live it with courage. Teach it with love.

### ***Tat tvam asi — Chandogya Upanishad***

*— That Thou Art*

*This is what Yama and Niyama ultimately reveal: you are not separate from what you are surrendering to. The practitioner and the practice, the seeker and the sought, are one.*

*— Dr. Shivam Mishra, Founder, SKM Yoga*

## 10.8 Final Reflection Questions

- Looking across all ten lessons, which of the ten principles — five Yamas and five Niyamas — do you feel most genuinely embodies as a regular practice? Which is most underdeveloped?

- What is the specific area of your teaching that would be most transformed by a deeper commitment to Ishvara Pranidhana?
- Write your personal Yama-Niyama commitment statement: a specific, honest account of which practices you commit to deepening in the next six months, and how.
- If you were to teach a single session on Yama and Niyama to a group of yoga beginners, which principle would you choose to focus on, and why? How would you make it practically accessible and genuinely inspiring?
- What question has this study left you with — not a question to be anxious about, but a question to live with, to let deepen over the coming years?

*"The study of Yama and Niyama has no graduation. Every morning you wake up, there it is again — the invitation to practise. Every evening you reflect, there it is — the honest assessment of how today went. Every year you live, there it is — the same principles, revealing depths you had not yet imagined."*

## Lesson

# Appendix A

## *Daily Sadhana for Yama & Niyama*

The following daily structure integrates practices from all ten lessons into a coherent morning and evening rhythm. Adapt it to your schedule — but maintain the essential elements consistently.

Time	Practice	Principle Cultivated
04:30 – 05:00	Rise. Cold water practice. Neti. Oral hygiene.	Saucha, Tapas
05:00 – 05:30	Pranayama: Nadi Shodhana (15 min) + Kapalabhati (5 min) + Bhramari (5 min)	Brahmacharya, Saucha
05:30 – 06:00	Meditation: Mantra, Self-inquiry, or Yoga Nidra	Svadyaya, Ishvara Pranidhana
06:00 – 07:00	Asana practice — without performance, with awareness	Tapas, Ahimsa (toward self)
07:00 – 07:30	Scripture study: 1 sutra or 1 Gita verse — contemplate, do not rush	Svadyaya
07:30 – 08:00	Journaling: reflection on yesterday, intention for today	Satya, Svadyaya, Santosha
Throughout the Day	Speech awareness: true, kind, necessary before speaking	Ahimsa, Satya
Throughout the Day	Abundance awareness: notice grasping and practise release	Asteya, Aparigraha
Evening	Gratitude practice: three specific appreciations	Santosha
Before Sleep	Evening review: where were the principles present/absent today?	All Yamas & Niyamas
Before Sleep	5 minutes of Ishvara Pranidhana: offer the day, release the results	Ishvara Pranidhana

## Lesson

# Appendix B

## *Reflection Journal Template*

Use this template weekly to track your Yama-Niyama practice. Complete it honestly, without self-judgment. Over months and years, your entries will become a detailed map of your inner development.

Principle	This Week's Observation	One Specific Practice to Try
Ahimsa (Non-violence)		
Satya (Truthfulness)		
Asteya (Non-stealing)		
Brahmacharya (Right energy use)		
Aparigraha (Non-possessiveness)		
Saucha (Purity)		
Santosha (Contentment)		
Tapas (Discipline)		
Svadyaya (Self-study)		
Ishvara Pranidhana (Surrender)		

## Lesson

# Appendix C

## *Teaching Yama & Niyama to Your Students*

As an SKM Yoga teacher, you will be called upon to introduce Yama and Niyama to students who may have little or no background in yoga philosophy. The following guidelines will help you make these teachings accessible, non-dogmatic, and genuinely transformative for modern practitioners.

### Principles for Teaching Yama-Niyama

- Always connect the principle to lived experience first. Begin with a practical scenario from daily life before introducing the Sanskrit term or philosophical context.
- Never moralize. Present these principles as invitations to inquiry, not as rules to be followed. The question 'What might it look like to practise non-violence in your relationships?' is more effective than 'You should be non-violent.'

- Share your own experience honestly. 'In my own practice, I find Asteya most challenging when...' This creates safety for students to be equally honest about their own struggles.
- Relate the principles directly to the physical practice. Ask students to observe Ahimsa in their relationship with the limits of their body in asana. Ask them to notice Satya — are they actually experiencing what they appear to be experiencing, or performing?
- Allow paradox. Santosha and growth. Tapas and self-compassion. These are not contradictions — they are the creative tensions that make the practice alive. Hold the complexity rather than resolving it prematurely.
- Make it sequential. In a regular class series, introduce one principle per week or month. Depth is far more valuable than breadth in this teaching.
- Create reflection practices. Give students a specific journaling prompt, a simple daily practice, or a behavioural experiment to apply outside the classroom.
- Model what you teach. Your embodiment of these principles is your most powerful pedagogy. Say less. Live more.

---

# SKM YOGA

## *Yama & Niyama for Yoga Teachers Training Students*

Compiled by Dr. Shivam Mishra — Founder, SKM Yoga

© SKM Yoga. All Rights Reserved. For educational use within SKM Yoga Teacher Training Programme.