

## Yama and Niyama - Yogic Ethics.

Most spiritual systems begin with some kind of ethics. In the Yogic system the role of ethics is to help the practitioner create a positive environment internally and externally which will be helpful for meditation. When our surrounding environment is in strife and disarray meditation is well nigh impossible. So before we go deeper on the spiritual journey it is necessary to create and maintain conditions which will be conducive to the journey. In ancient days students would have to spend many years following and perfecting these ethical principles before their teachers would teach more advanced meditation lessons.

The word “Yama” (as in Yama and Niyama) means to control. The spirit is that an effort is made to maintain control over our natural human tendencies and direct them in a positive way where necessary in order to lead a happy life. Yoga is very clear that control does not mean repression or denial. Great care is taken on the Yogic path to view all energy in a positive way but nevertheless learn how to control and direct it.

The Yamas and Niyamas (External and Internal Ethics) make up 2 limbs of the classical Yoga system known as “**The 8 Limbs of Yoga**” or “**Astaanga Yoga**”. These practices develop the body, mind and Self in an integrated and progressive way. They begin with the environment, proceed towards the body and then inwards through the successive levels of mind culminating in the Atman or Self.

The 8 limbs are respectively:

<b>Yama</b>	External ethics. Controls the Conscious Mind and its relationship to the environment.
<b>Niyama</b>	Internal ethics. Controls the Conscious Mind itself.
<b>Yoga Asanas</b>	Postures. Give control over the Body.
<b>Pranayama</b>	Breath control. Gives control over the Sub-conscious Mind.
<b>Pratyahara</b>	Sensory withdrawal. Gives control over the Supramental Mind.
<b>Dharana</b>	Concentration. Gives control over the Subliminal Mind.
<b>Dhyana</b>	Meditation. Gives control over the Subtle Causal Mind.
<b>Samadhi</b>	Suspension of mind. Establishes one in the Self or Atman which is beyond the mind. It is spiritual absorption.

The Yamas and Niyamas consist of ten ethical principles. They are summarised briefly below. For a more detailed explanation see the book, "A Guide To Human Conduct" by Shrii Shrii Anandamurti, available from your teacher.

### The Five Yamas:

- AHIMSA:** Not to harm any living being (this does not include legitimate self-defence).
- ASTEYA:** Not to take what belongs to others nor deprive them of their due in thought or deed.
- SATYA:** To be guided by the spirit of welfare in one's speech and action (as distinct from truthfulness which may lack kindness and benevolence).
- BRAHMACARYA:** To endeavour to deal with all people and all things as manifestations of Divine Consciousness.
- APARIGRAHA:** To make do with the simple necessities of life in order that others may also have enough to live.

### The Five Niyamas

- SHAOCA:** Keeping body, mind and environment clean. Actively resisting degrading thoughts by replacing them with positive ones.
- SANTOSHA:** Maintaining mental calm and balance. Restraining emotional extremes and treating all people equally.
- TAPAH:** Availing of opportunities to make personal sacrifices on behalf of disadvantaged persons.
- SVADHYAYA:** Studying spiritual books and keeping spiritual company.
- IISHVARA PRANIDHANA:** Always being conscious of the goal of one's life and guiding all one's actions by that goal.