



Svaroopaa® Vidya Ashram

February 2018 Teachings Article:

Spiritual Upliftment #2

Just Don't

By Swami Nirmalananda & Rukmini Abbruzzi

Svaroopaa® yoga propels you gloriously and easily into deep and profound inner experiences, even more tangibly when you receive Shaktipat. Instead of athleticism, *Svaroopaa*® yoga specializes in the inner experiences of your own Self, which is the deepest level of your own existence. Especially when you receive the inner awakening of Shaktipat, you've got your Self. Yet you get the inner experience of your Self every time you lengthen your tailbone.

When you have that inner experience, what happens next? Unfortunately, your mind gets in the way, blocking your inner experience by occupying you with thousands of thoughts. Some thoughts are creative, inspired, uplifting and even entertaining. Most are none of the above. Too many of your thoughts are self-limiting: worries, guilt, blame and painful memories. Your mind behaves like a puppy who likes to eat and roll around in stinky stuff.

You can change how your mind works by practicing yoga's yamas. These lifestyle practices uplift you, keeping your mind from pulling you out of Consciousness. Yamas are how you free yourself from the cycle of pain you've been trapped in for too long.

ahi.msa satya asteya brahmacharya aparigraha yamaa.h

Non-harming, speaking only truth, non-stealing, celibacy and non-greediness
are the yamas. — Patanjali's Yoga Sutras 2.30

Most people accept harming others, lying, stealing, lust and greediness as part of a normal lifestyle. These behaviors mess with your mind and heart. They weight down your soul; it's called karma. "Too many people rationalize their behavior by saying, 'I'm only human,' lowering their personal standards to a level they don't have to work at," says Swami Nirmalananda. "Yoga's texts describe human beings as a combination of human and animal, also called divine and demonic. You choose what to emphasize in your life. What you choose determines what you become."

In practicing the yamas, you avoid doing things that most people consider acceptable: planning revenge on someone, telling "little white lies," sexualizing everything, etc. Early in the process, you discover what your mind has been doing to you. Then you develop impulse control. It's called "cleaning up your act." Your mind becomes quieter so you experience more peace, more creativity, a growing benevolence and a sweet receptivity to the inner flow of Grace.

You can tell that you need these lifestyle practices if you don't yet enjoy the results that Patanjali promises:

In your presence, all others cease to feel hostility — when you master non-harming (ahimsa)

All your words and actions bring about their intended result — when you speak only truth (satya)

Great riches present themselves to you freely — when you master non-stealing (asteya)

You gain full potency, great strength and power — when you master celibacy (brahmacharya)

You know why you were born, what you are here to do — when you master non-greediness (aparigraha).

Fortunately, the yamas are very time efficient. You do them in the midst of life. As a yogi, you adopt an excellent standard for how to live in the world, consciously choosing your actions, words and thoughts.

Ahimsa: Do no harm, not to others, not to plants or animals, not to the planet. Of course you want to live this way! Most yogis are civilized, not pushing other people out of the way in order to get the good deal on Black Friday. But your driving habits probably offer you something to work on, as well as what you say about other people and even what you think of them. Practicing ahimsa helps you become aware of your violent impulses before you act on them, and then you DON'T act on them. Even with your words and thoughts, just don't.

Any yoga eases you in this direction. If you're doing only the poses, yogic breathing or meditation, ahimsa develops in you spontaneously. Rukmini says, "A vegetarian since my twenties, I still ate eggs. Then I came home from a Teacher Training and I couldn't eat them anymore. Something had shifted in me so much that it was just not an option anymore." This inner shift is an organic upliftment that is yoga's purpose, making harmful impulses simply dissolve away. But you may have to work on getting free from your worst impulses.

Yoga recommends vegetarianism because of ahimsa; it's not about better health. Ahimsa is not about being good or kind, and not even about making the world a better place. You stop causing harm because of the difference it makes inside. When you stop acting on harmful impulses, the impulses themselves begin to die on the vine. You become free from the cascade of impulse->thought->word->action that weights you down and blocks your inner openings. Life gets easier. Plus others cease to feel hostility when you are present.

Satya: Speak only truth. You choose to refrain from lying in order to align yourself with “capital-T Truth.” This is the Truth of your own existence — the Divine Consciousness that you already are. “Satya” comes from the Sanskrit root “sat,” a name of your own Self. Speaking an untruth cuts yourself off from your Self. Speaking only truth helps uncover the light of your own being, so that you may live in it more fully.

Ahimsa always comes first. This means you don’t have to tell the whole truth unless you are in court. When speaking the truth would cause harm, you don’t lie but merely leave some things unsaid. For example, if a friend’s weight loss has aged her somewhat, genuinely congratulate her on her success in losing the weight. This choice is not about being nice; it’s not a way to make others like you. Instead, speaking only truth aligns you with the Truth of your own Self, giving you profound clarity while making your words and actions powerful.

Asteya: Don’t steal. Yogis are usually not thieves, so you have to look at your behaviors more closely to catch yourself in the act. Taking extra napkins or ketchup packets from a restaurant for future use is stealing. The borrowed pen that’s not returned, fudged numbers on your taxes and using a neighbor’s wifi signal are all stealing. It’s simple, don’t take things that don’t belong to you.

Impulses to steal do arise within. They are fear-based, coming from a feeling that you don’t have or you won’t get enough, or that you don’t have what you need, even that you aren’t good enough. No matter what arises within, every time you choose NOT to act on it, you are choosing NOT to reinforce a painful, self-limiting loop. You are getting free from patterns that have tied you up in knots for your whole life, even for lifetimes.

Great riches present themselves freely to a master of asteya. Why? Because if great riches presented themselves earlier, what would you use them for? Only when you are free from “sticky fingers” can you manage such great gifts for their true purpose.

Brahmacharya: Celibacy. Yoga knows that sex is a charged topic and approaches it respectfully, showing you how to deal with it sensitively. The percentage of your life you spend in sexual activity is so small, but the percentage you spend in thinking about sex is way too big. Choosing to abstain from sexual activity helps you see it for what it is — merely a part of life, not the goal or purpose.

Practicing brahmacharya, you refrain from sexual experiences as well as from words and thoughts about sex. In the process, you’ll discover how pervasive sexuality is in the media, even in the ads trying to sell you vitamins or cars. You may decide to go on a media vacation in order to support a period of choiceful celibacy.

This yama is not about good and bad or right and wrong. It’s not about morality or religion. The reason celibacy is challenging is because of what your sexuality stirs up in you: the thoughts, emotions, memories, desires and fears. As you practice being aware of sexual impulses, yet not acting on them, you discover who you are beneath and beyond the needs and identities entangled in your sexuality. You discover that the potency of sexuality comes from the power of life itself, arising from the Self within. Then every thought and action is fully potent, bring Consciousness into the world in a tangible way.

Aparigraha: No more greediness. Simply restrain yourself from acting on greed, from grasping for things you don’t need. You don’t have to do without genuine needs, like food, clothing, shelter, etc. Instead, find the dotted line between need and greed. That line may be easier to discern with your food choices, but it shows up everywhere. How many freshly baked cookies, how many pairs of winter boots, how many pairs of earrings are enough? You are the one who decides. The greedy impulse will arise, but you simply DON’T act on it.

Greed is formally promoted in the Western world, modeled by sports and entertainment figures, politicians and business moguls. When you grasp for something outside of you, it’s because you are not experiencing your Self. Yoga gives you your inherent fullness and wholeness. You are complete inside. It’s only when you don’t feel whole that you look for something outside to fill you up. But nothing outside will ever do the job.

Aparigraha is the last of the yamas because of how challenging it is. Practicing aparigraha short-circuits the painful perpetual cycle of grasping for things that leave you feeling empty. Freedom from that cycle opens the inner pathway through which Grace flows, opening you to the ever-expanding bliss of your own Beingness.

Yoga changes you. This is the good news. You’re already in the process, but not done yet. You cannot go back to who you used to be, and don’t even want to. But you’re not yet who you’re going to be. Practicing the yamas propels your process along and makes it easier. Apply yourself, but don’t be too hard on yourself. Do more yoga.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES ON “SPIRITUAL UPLIFTMENT,” OUR THEME FOR 2018, CO-AUTHORED BY SWAMI NIRMALANANDA SARASWATI, VIDYADEVI STILLMAN & RUKMINI ABBRUZZI.

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