

Raja Yoga

I. Yama: Avoiding the Counter-Productive

We all want good experiences but often fail to realize that the experiences are not the result of circumstances or conditions but of our actions—mental and physical. Our actions are the result of thought and the triggers of thought are wrong values we hold in our understanding—the heart from where we see things.

For change, we must keep the elements of yama or avoidance right in front of the mind's eye so we are able to make healthier choices instead.

1. Ahimsa, the Absence of Violence

Ahimsa or the absence of violence comes naturally when you consider none as other or 'our people'. Preference of any kind is unjustified as it results in special treatment to those we consider 'ours' and this results in different treatment to others. The seeds of fear are sown when there is this otherness says sage Yajnavalkya in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad: "Where there is other, there is fear". Fear results in avoidance and frustration, anger and eventually, violence result when avoidance is not possible as is often the case.

2. Satyam, Honesty in all Dealings

Satyam is not only speaking the truth but abiding in truth. Abiding in truth is the expansion of truth within just as the seed abides in the earth and is nourished into a huge tree. We draw from the earth and waters of truth and truth flowers within. One cannot be selective for our selfish convenience—to embrace honesty, we must be honest in all our dealings.

This does not give us the license to be crude and say things as they are without concern for the hurt it may cause others. This is why satyam or truthfulness in all dealings comes after ahimsa or the absence of violence. Before you say something, ask yourself if it will degrade the situation that already exists. If it may, it is better to smile and not disturb things as we must be disturbed first to disturb others or things as they are.

When truthfulness flowers within, we are free from the fetters of worry as there is only one honest and truthful response to any situation in life and embracing truthfulness is embracing

clarity. When there is clarity, there is no need for excessive thought which produces predisposition or conditioning and increases inner limitation.

3. Asteya, Avoiding the Unnecessary

Asteya is translated as non-stealing or not taking what is not yours. The yogi sees contentment as essential for cultivating asteya or non-stealing. If I lead a simple life, not wrapped up in competing with others or materiality, the urge to appropriate and possess things legally or illegally will just not be there.

When one is caught-up in what is mistakenly called 'quality of life'—there is loss of quality of the one who lives life. When the 'what' becomes important, the 'how' can always be justified. The yogi questions all and any 'what' that arise and sees clearly if any of it is necessary and thus, stays psychologically disentangled from things. We are never caught-up in the 'many things' but in maniness which is the passion of the mind.

When you avoid the unnecessary, asteya or non-stealing becomes natural. Contentment is the greatest gain not only monetarily but for peace of mind from the raging fires of passion.

4. Brahmacharya, a Life of Conservation

Brahmacharya is not just countenance, it is a life of purity or a life lived in the presence of God. Brhamacharya is a life of discipline, not imposed by others or by suppression but by healthier ways that conserve energy and avoid the build-up of passion.

After our education, we begin both our careers and family life. Both these present a dual opportunities in regular choices to be made: the pleasant or the good. Pursuit of the pleasant increases passion which compels one towards more and asteya or non-appropriation becomes difficult. Choosing the good is the way of selecting just what is necessary and available so as to never fan the fires of passion which blind the inner intelligence in time.

This is why brahmacharya comes after asteya or avoiding the unnecessary. Contentment is the sentry who guards the mind's peace and balance. Brahmacharya or a life of discipline and conservation flows naturally when one is contented with what comes naturally. The yogi realizes that things are not the problem but the wanting is. Wanting of any kind is restlessness and clouds perception and understanding.

Contentment leads to conservation of energy by a lesser demand for energy. Conserved energy is at once available to repair the body and for other functions. Lesser demand for things is a lesser need for thought and there is mental balance as well as conservation of psychic energy which is very concentrated energy.

5. Aparigraha, the Absence of Greed

Here again, contentment becomes supremely important. A mind filled with greed or desire to possess is never in balance, always agitated and lacks clarity. The urge to possess does not take into account the needs of others: "I must have..." is felt strongly about things and self-justified in many ways.

If one lives a life of conservation, greed becomes a non-issue. Without greed or passion, anger has no place. Anger is a response of the mind that is filled with unfulfilled desires—they can even be desires or strong wishes for certain conditions that it feels are important.

When the 'wanting' is disposed of, greed and covetousness becomes a non-issue. Here, we are talking about any and all types of wanting: for people, things or even conditions. There is still dynamic action but free of greed or wanting, and therefore, free of fear, disappointment and anger.

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