

Siddha Marg



आत्मानुरज्यः

It is a wonderful teaching for each and every one of us to remember that love is the most important thing. Love is what each and every one of us seeks, wants, and wishes to have. We look for it outside ourselves. The sages tell us to look for it inside; it is there.

Baba's message is "Love your own Self." When we love our own Self, then what we share with everyone is that love. So I pray and wish that each moment of our life, every single day, is filled with love.

MAHĀMANDALESHWAR SWAMI NITYĀNANDA

The purpose of Siddha Marg is to communicate the teachings of Mahāmandaleshwar Swami Nityānanda as he shares with us the knowledge and practices of the sanātan dharma (universal law). This issue presents an answer Gurudev gave during a satsaṅg in Walden during June 2014.

Gurudev was asked if the yamas and niyamas are really relevant in our modern life, and if he could reinterpret them in a way that is meaningful today. This excerpt focuses on his discussion of the yamas.

*T*his question refers to two things: the yamas and niyamas. But we will first look at the whole package, which is *aṣṭāṅga* yoga, the eight limbs of yoga.

Recently I heard a story about a young man who goes to visit a swami. He says, "I want to learn to meditate."

The swami starts talking to him about *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *yama*, *niyama*, *pratyāhāra*, and *dhāraṇā*, which are the six things that need to happen before you meditate.

The man says, "I only want to meditate. I don't want to know about *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *yama*, *niyama*, *pratyāhāra*, and *dhāraṇā*. I just want to meditate."

The swami asks him, "Do you want to learn a partial yoga or do you want to learn the whole thing?"

The *āsanas*, or postures, you learn in *hatha* yoga are only one part of *aṣṭāṅga* yoga.

The yogis tell us that the process of yoga takes place like a child developing inside its mother's womb. All the limbs develop at the same time. The child doesn't develop the head, then the torso, then the legs and feet and arms. All the parts develop simultaneously.

In the same way, you can't say, "I'll just do *āsana* until I get good at it. Then I'll do *prāṇāyāma*. Then I'll do *yama*. Then I'll do *niyama*. Then I'll do *pratyāhāra*. Then I'll do *dhāraṇā*. Then I'll do *dhyāna*. And then I will get to *samādhi*."

All of these need to happen within the twenty-four hour span of your life; that is, on a regular, daily basis. You have to do *āsana*. You have to do *prāṇāyāma*. You have to do *yama*. You have to do *niyama*. You have to do *pratyāhāra*. You have to do *dhāraṇā*. You have to do *dhyāna*. You have to do *samādhi*.

The Eight Limbs of Yoga

When you begin to do hatha yoga, you realize the effect it has upon you within.

The first limb people learn about is āsana. In our society today, hatha yoga has been brought into the gym, and many people think that's all there is to yoga. But hatha yoga is not meant to be a complete yoga unto itself.

The word *hatha* comes from *ha* and *tha*, meaning the sun and moon, respectively. When you begin to do hatha yoga, you realize the effect it has upon you within. What happens to your physical body is only the byproduct of what happens within you. You find that you have more muscle. You feel better. But the main change is what takes place within. Am I correct, yoga teachers?

Āsana means to be established in a particular position. Patañjali describes this in the *Yoga Sūtras* by saying, “Be steady, be still.” In order to get into meditation, you have to first become steady, you have to become alert. You have to be in a place of *sukha*.

Sukha often is translated as pleasure, but I think of it as contentment. Unless you are content, you can't practice yoga. You can't sit because you are not still, you are not content.

As you begin the practice of hatha yoga, it takes some months to some years to understand what is actually taking place in your body. A yogi has to study for a period of years. Today, there are week-long courses and maybe even weekend courses. People take them and say, “Now I know hatha yoga.” But if you go to such a person to learn hatha

yoga, you won't learn hatha yoga. You will learn a few movements, but not the full yoga.

After āsana, the next limb is prāṇāyāma, control of the breath. The physical postures and the movement of the breath have to be done together. *Prāṇa*—which we won't go into right now—refers to the life force, which performs five functions within the body. And *āyama* means to expand. We allow the breath to become long, to expand.

Yoga philosophy teaches us that the quality of our prāna is related to the state of our mind.

When you are agitated, people tell you, “Take a deep breath.” They want you to calm down by taking a deep breath. Prāṇāyāma involves learning to take full inhalations and full exhalations.

The question was about yamas and niyamas. We'll get into that. They are the third and fourth limbs.

The fifth limb is pratyāhāra. *Āhāra* is food, nourishment. The *Bhagavad Gītā* explains pratyāhāra using the example of a tortoise. We have all seen how a tortoise withdraws into its shell. Similarly, a yogi learns to withdraw his senses. He does not nourish his senses or his mind with external objects. Rather, he takes nourishment from within himself.

For example, a child is crying. So—at least today—the parent immediately gives him an iPad or an iPhone or an ice cream or something. Over time, the child develops a

The Eight Limbs of Yoga (continued)

A yogi learns to withdraw his senses. He does not nourish his senses or his mind with external objects. Rather, he takes nourishment from within himself.

habit of thinking, “Whenever I am sad or upset, or I am crying, my senses need to go out and grab something.”

Forty or fifty years later, when the physical body has developed one or another sickness, the health-care practitioner tells the person to stay away from most of these things. Of course, society today has created other things that can satisfy the need to grab onto something external. But the yogi says no. Simply go inside. Practice pratyāhāra.

As you go inside, you need something to help you. So Patañjali introduces dhāraṇā. *Dha* means to hold, to focus the mind.

Think about how disturbed and agitated the mind can be. One of the first things a meditator notices is “my mind is running.” If I say that it is running in a million different directions, that would not be an exaggeration.

The mind is not satisfied. It’s not contented. It’s not at peace. Therefore, the body is fidgety. Therefore, the breath is uneven. Therefore, thoughts are disturbed.

The sage says, “When you have done āsana, when you have done prāṇāyāma, when you have done yama, when you have done niyama, then you come to dhāraṇā.”

Because the question today is about the yamas and niyamas, we will focus just upon that much.

Recently I read something I thought I’d share.

A modern sage says, “People who are withdrawing from excessive activity are not causing any damage either to themselves, the society, the world, the environment, or the planet. It is only people who are engaged in activity in absolute unawareness who are truly destroying this world.”

Don’t get depressed. These are just thoughts to awaken us so we ask ourselves, “What am I doing?”

I am leading you to yama and niyama. You need to understand this before you can get to yama and niyama.

So the sage says, “Right now, the most responsible thing you can do is to withdraw from unconscious activity, but withdrawing from activity is not so simple.”

For example, we’ve tried to have breakfast in silence in the ashram. I don’t know how successful we’ve been.

People think, “I’ve been up since 4 o’clock, or 5 o’clock. I’ve already taken a walk on the rail trail. I’ve already done my āsanās. I have been to the temple. The *ārati* is over. The text has been chanted. I’ve done my ten minutes of token meditation. Now I’m dying to say something! Because I’ve already been at it for three or four hours.”

A few people may go to the Śiva *lingam* by the stream and sit there. They listen to the water flowing. If someone approaches, they think, “Go away. I like the noise I have in my own head. I want to listen to that before I listen to you giving me more noise.”

You may see these people and think, “What are they doing?”

This is why the sage says withdrawing is not so simple. He says, “It takes tremendous maturity to simply sit quietly.”

Some people tell me, “Who will do it if I don’t do it?”

My question is, if you die now, will your family say, “Oh my God, who will take care of us now?”

No. They will burn you or bury you. They will dispose of your body. And then they will go on with life. They will put

The Eight Limbs of Yoga (continued)

a picture up and say, “He was a very nice person.” That’s it. Their life won’t stop. Nobody’s life stops. Nobody pauses for long.

The Indian tradition says one should mourn for thirteen days. But today everybody says, “I don’t have time for thirteen days. How can I mourn for thirteen days? And what do I mourn about? My loved one is gone. So for whom should I mourn?”

The mourning is actually for you. It is for you so you realize the same thing is going to happen to you one day.

The sage says that withdrawing from activity does not come as the result of being lazy or irresponsible. He says, “It comes because you are aware and conscious.”

If we think now about the yamas and niyamas, we understand that they must be done with awareness, with consciousness.

Discipline is important in each and every one’s life.

Humans may think, “I don’t need discipline.” But all of us who’ve had dogs know how you train a dog. For example, you train him to know that you will take him for a walk at 5:00 am. Over time, the dog will come and sit at the foot of your bed at 4:58 or 4:59 and go, “Arrr-rrrr.” He is telling you that you need to go to the bathroom and brush your teeth. He’s saying, “We need to get going!” He gives you a five-minute warning, like an alarm clock.

You say, “Shh, shut up! I want to sleep.”

“It takes tremendous maturity to simply sit quietly.”



For a moment he says, “Okay. Fine.” But then he licks your feet or your face. The next thing you know, he is on top of you, looking at you, as if he’s saying, “Are we going or not? It’s past 5:15 now!”

Or you have a cow, and you milk it at 5:00 am and 5:00 pm, or 4:00 am and 4:00 pm. Suppose you miss the time by ten minutes, fifteen minutes. You walk into the place where the cow is tied up. It’s crying, “Moo!” It’s telling you, “It’s time!”

So a yogi says, “Become disciplined.” This is where the yamas and niyamas come in.

The Yamas

The yamas refer to the attitude we must have toward external things and people.

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he yamas refer to the attitude we must have toward external things and people. The niyamas refer to the internal observances we must follow. Of course, the attitude for the yamas also comes from within.

In *sūtra* thirty of the *Yoga Sūtras*, Patañjali lists the yamas: *ahimsā*, *satya*, *asteya*, *brahmacharya*, *aparigraha*. What do the yamas mean? *Ahimsā* is harmlessness. *Satya* means speaking the truth. *Asteya* means not stealing. *Brahmacharya* means moving toward the highest Truth. *Aparigraha* means not taking, not seizing.

We start with *ahimsā*. This is the quality Mahatma Gandhi was known for around the world. The definition used is nonviolence. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. took the teaching of nonviolence and applied it in his movement.

Ahimsā is *a* and *himsā*. *Himsā* means cruelty. In Sanskrit, when you see an *ā* or an *a* at the beginning of a word, it means no. *Ahimsā* is not just avoiding physical actions so you don't hurt somebody on the outside, but it is actually changing your entire thought process so it becomes nonviolent. That is the true meaning of harmlessness. Your thought itself is peaceful.

A yogi would say, "Pay attention to what you consume as food." Because food is what creates thought. Food is what creates dreams. Therefore a *sāttvic*, or pure and uplifting, diet is important.

You can't just say, "I'll become nonviolent" or "I'll become harmless." You have to look at your thought process, the

food you eat, the company you keep, the movies you see, the music you listen to, and all of that, in order to achieve *ahimsā*.

The second is *satya*. I'm sure many in this world think, "I speak the truth. I only speak the truth. I never speak anything but the truth."

In the *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa is clear when he says speech should not just be truthful, it should be pleasing to the ear and it should be beneficial, as well.

When you tell something to someone, he should be pleased to hear what you are saying and he should also be uplifted. You can't just speak the truth, thinking, "I don't care what you feel." Then you have not told the truth because you have done *himsā*. You've been violent. You've been harmful.

The sage would say, "Just be silent." It is difficult, I know. You have to take a big breath. Over time, you realize your whole thought process and your speech have to become linked. Everything goes back to your thoughts: "O my mind, have noble thoughts. Have auspicious thoughts." If you have noble and auspicious thoughts, then what you speak will also be noble and auspicious.

Yoga teaches the discipline of speech. You come to a place within yourself where you don't speak too much. You only speak a little, but what little you say comes true. This is because your speech is imbued with *śakti*, power. Your speech is connected to the divinity within.

The Yamas (continued)

Yoga teaches the discipline of speech.

This occurs over a period of time. Don't think that if you're silent for twenty-four hours, your speech will be powerful tomorrow.

But try, sometimes, to be silent. And try not only to be silent through the mouth, but to be silent in the mind, also. Try to have fewer thoughts.

Now, *asteya*. *Steya* means stealing. So *asteya* is not stealing. We should not take things that don't belong to us, things to which we are not entitled.

Normally, we go to a shop, we pick up something, and we pay for it. But if we pick up something, put it in our bag, and walk out, that's called shoplifting. You can see it on the security camera.

The next is *brahmacharya*. Many people think of *brahmacharya* simply as celibacy, as not having sexual relations. But the sages describe it as "grazing in the Absolute," as "walking toward Brahman."

Therefore, we form relationships that foster the understanding of the great Truth. We keep the company of those who talk about the Truth.

I often use the example of Swami Brahmānanda Mahārāj. We sat in his company when he was eighty. We were in our thirties, so he was almost fifty years our senior. He would sit with his books, and people would come. He would put his book down, take his glasses off, and say, "How are you? What is going on?"

Sometimes the person would begin to gossip.

Over time, I realized Mahārājji never told people not to say what they were saying. Instead, in his gentle way, he led them to a higher conversation. They probably never realized

how he had shifted away from gossip or just loose talk to an uplifting conversation of *satsaṅg*.

I'm sure he didn't even say to himself, "Now I'm going to do this." But because he kept noble company and auspicious thoughts through his study, gossip and loose talk did not hold value. He was able to lead people into a conversation that was uplifting without ever demeaning them.

When people walked away, they felt uplifted, happy. They felt their problems were solved just by telling Mahārājji. All Mahārājji had done was remind them, "You are the Absolute. You are Truth. You are divine."

So each of us must remember to let our mind always graze in thoughts of the highest Truth. The first three yamas—*ahimsā*, *satya*, and *asteya*—happen automatically when the mind is established in the highest Truth.

The last is *aparigraha*. It means not taking, not seizing, or taking only that which is necessary.

I'll share two stories.

One happened here in the United States. An armored truck driving on the freeway accidentally dropped a brown paper bag—I'll assume it was brown—with cash. How it fell out of an armored truck, I don't know. But this is how I read it.

A person who has no money finds this bag. It has about 100,000 US dollars in it. He turns it in.

A news station picks up the story and reports it. The man is asked, "Nobody would have known you found this bag, so why did you turn it in?"

He says, "I have children at home. They would have seen that all of a sudden I have cash. They would ask, 'Where did

The Yamas (continued)

**Let your mind always
graze in thoughts of the
highest Truth.**

this come from, Daddy?’ At some point, I would have to tell them the truth. I would have to say it’s not really mine, I just found it. I realized it is better in the long run that they think I am an honest man. So I did not keep what was not mine.”

This is aparigraha, not taking advantage of a situation. Of course, it’s tempting. I’m sure the man thought about that. But because his mind had constantly kept good company, he was able to make the decision to return it, knowing that was the best thing to do.

The second story is about Bhagavān Nityānanda.

Behind where his samādhi shrine stands now is a temple to Kṛṣṇa. One day, he tells a person, “Go to the temple and empty the donation box. Take sixty percent of the money and leave forty percent.”

The person goes there and takes sixty percent and leaves forty percent.

The next morning, he comes to Bhagavān and reports, “The box has been broken into.”

Bhagavān says, “That’s why I left the forty percent. I knew there would be a break-in, and I knew the person needed money. But he only needed the amount that was left.”

This goes back to the matter of satya. You come to a place of truth within yourself. Then what you say comes true. You are able to connect.

Often people say, “I’m going to connect to Truth.” They are like a doctor with a stethoscope. “How am I feeling now? Truth? Let me see. Wait one second, I’m just connecting to the Truth. I can’t feel the Truth right now. I’ll call you back in an hour. Truth? Not connected yet. Maybe in two hours. No, not connected yet.”

They’re never connected!

Either you are connected or you’re not. Of course, you can fake it till you make it. But don’t play games! Don’t have your phone in airplane mode and complain it’s not connecting to the tower. That’s a game people play with themselves.

Similarly, you can’t say, “I will follow the yamas on Monday and Thursday and Sunday. And on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday I’ll just be me.”

Sometimes people say, “I’m spiritual today. Today I’m holy.” Another day they say, “Don’t count on me to behave the right way.”

The scriptures tell us, “It is only when one puts forth effort that one is able to accomplish something in life.” You can’t just sit there and use your imagination.

The example given is of a lion. A lion cannot lie there and imagine that food from the forest will come to him. He can’t simply dream that a deer will walk into his mouth.

We as humans tend to be like that. We dream, but we don’t necessarily make the effort.

The yamas and niyamas require effort. Effort must be put forth every single moment, every single day. To be nonviolent, to be truthful, to graze in Brahman, to not steal, to not want somebody else’s things—these are practices the mind must do regularly.



G L O S S A R Y

āhāra

food

ahimsā

nonviolence

aparigraha

non-acquisitiveness

ārati

waving of lights to worship a deity

āsana

yogic posture

aṣṭāṅga yoga

8-limbed yoga described by Patañjali

asteya

non-covetousness

Bhagavad Gītā

Hindu scripture

brahmacharya

celibacy

dhāraṇā

concentration

dhyāna

meditation

himṣā

cruelty, harm

liṅgam

form of the formless Śiva

KṛṣṇaHindu deity, Guru of Arjuna in the
*Bhagavad Gītā***niyama**

restraint

Patañjali[2nd c BCE] author of the *Yoga Sūtras***prāṇa**

the life breath

prāṇāyāma

regulation of the breath

pratyāhāra

withdrawal of the senses

śaktithe creative energy of the universe;
the awakened spiritual energy**samādhi**

union with the Absolute

satsaṅg

in the company of the Truth

sāttvic

having a pure quality

satya

truthfulness

Śiva

the Lord of dissolution

steya

stealing

sukha

pleasure, contentment

sūtra

aphorism, verse

yama

disciplined practice

