

Off the Mat: Living Yoga in Daily Life

Week 4: The Niyamas, or Five Wholesome States

The Niyamas are based on this principle: what you practice grows stronger. Feelings of joy, contentment, gratitude, love, peacefulness are not just naturally-arising. Rather, we can intentionally cultivate them through daily practice. The Niyamas help us become the best version of ourselves!

The Niyamas

1. Purity (Sauca)
2. Contentment (Santosa)
3. Discipline (Tapas)
4. Self-study (Svadhyaya)
5. Surrender (Isvara-pranidhana)

How to Practice Purity (Sauca)

An invitation to clean up our bodies, minds, attitudes and action so that we can become more available to the qualities we are seeking. Includes cleansing ourselves, purifying relationships with others, and accepting yourself how you are, both the light and dark.

1. Take care of your health. Eat healthy food, exercise, get enough sleep, drink more water.
2. Keep your house in order. Declutter, organize, do your chores.
3. Purify your speech. Say things that lift others up, not tear them down. Eliminate speech that is toxic, negative, stale, or unnecessary.
4. Slow down. Do one thing at a time, and try to focus on what you are doing.
5. Let other people be how they are, and not how you wish they were.
6. Practice staying with yourself through difficult emotions, using your mindfulness practice of noticing, and journaling.

How to Practice Contentment (Santosa)

Invites us to practice gratitude for what we have, stay present, and accept what is happening in the moment.

1. Practice gratitude! Write down everyday what you are most grateful for.
2. Notice when you feel yourself getting ready for the next thing, or looking for contentment outside of yourself. Notice what happens physically: muscles tensing, a sense of agitation. Simple try to relax those sensations and take some breaths.
3. Practice staying with and feeling emotional disturbances. When difficult feelings well up, try not to cut yourself off from them, but rather let them pass through.

How to Practice Discipline (Tapas)

The inner heat of transformation. Challenges us to do the things that push us in the direction of growth, to move through difficulty with integrity. Doing your best.

1. Perform a daily *sadhana*, or daily spiritual practice that combines movement, breathing, meditation and intention-setting. Commit to doing it for a specific number of days, and do it even (especially!) on days you do not feel like it.
2. Set a goal to accomplish something physically challenging, and work toward it daily. Don't give up, even when it gets hard.
3. Do something that will benefit your personal and spiritual growth, but is out of your comfort zone.
4. Eliminate a small, unwanted habit, cold turkey.

How to Practice Self-Study (Svadhyaya)

A belief that we are each good at our core, combined with the process of unpacking our layers of personality, prejudices, opinions that cloud over the Light of the Soul. How you could start to act more from your Divine core: truth, purity, beauty and justice in your speech, behaviors and actions?

1. Spend a little time journaling, daily or weekly. Simple write down what is going on, your thoughts and your feelings.
2. Write down five statements about the world, as you see it. What you write will tell you more about yourself than the world, and provide clues for how you structure your beliefs.
3. Try to notice how you present yourself to others, by observing the stories you tend to tell about yourself, the words you use. Are you self-deprecating, or aggrandizing? What type of stories do you tell? What can this tell you about how you see yourself?
4. When you have a negative reaction to something, experience disharmony or even hatred, step back and try to unpack why.

How to Practice Surrender (Isvara-pranidhana)

Asks us to stop trying to control everything, and to surrender to something greater. It is the last "jewel" because as we continue to work the path of yoga, we gain more clarity about what is important, what we cannot change, and what is ours to do.

1. Do savasana. Lie down on your back for 10 minutes. Feel the ground supporting you. Feel your breath flowing in and out without effort. Release tension in your muscles. Do nothing, trusting that your body will continue to be held and the next breath will come.
2. Practice a 5-minute breathing meditation in which you mentally say the word "Let" on your inhale and "Go" on your exhale.

3. Notice when you physically tense and mentally agitated because you want things to go a certain way. Pause, and relax the tension in your muscles. Take a few deep breaths.
4. If you want to feel a stronger connection to the Divine, simply ask God to come into your life.

Moving Forward: Transformation through Daily Practice

- All we have is each precious day, to live well or not. How we choose to do the simple things matters a great deal.
- Small daily practices, done consistently and with integrity can transform us over the course of time.
- Think about a stream creating a valley, or how exercising everyday transforms your body. We know that our brains are transformed in the same way.
- A good, satisfying life is based on developing the skills and awareness that allows us to gain mastery over our choices.
- What would it be like to fall in love with your daily practice? To let it evolve and grow in unexpected ways? To be so committed to yourself, to your soul, and to serving the world that you wake up excited to do your practice?