

“Off the Mat: Living Yoga in Daily Life.”

Week Four: The Niyamas and Beyond



*Which practices have you enjoyed most? Which are working for you?
How are you growing? What are you being called toward?*

The Niyamas: The Five Practices

- Joy, contentment, gratitude, commitment are not just naturally-arising—we can intentionally cultivate them.
- Neuroscience confirms this. The brain is physically changed through repeated stimulation.
- What we practice grows stronger.
- The Niyamas are five practices that train our hearts and minds toward these positive states-of-being. The best version of ourselves.



The Niyamas: The Five Practices

We can cultivate wholesome, happier states of being.

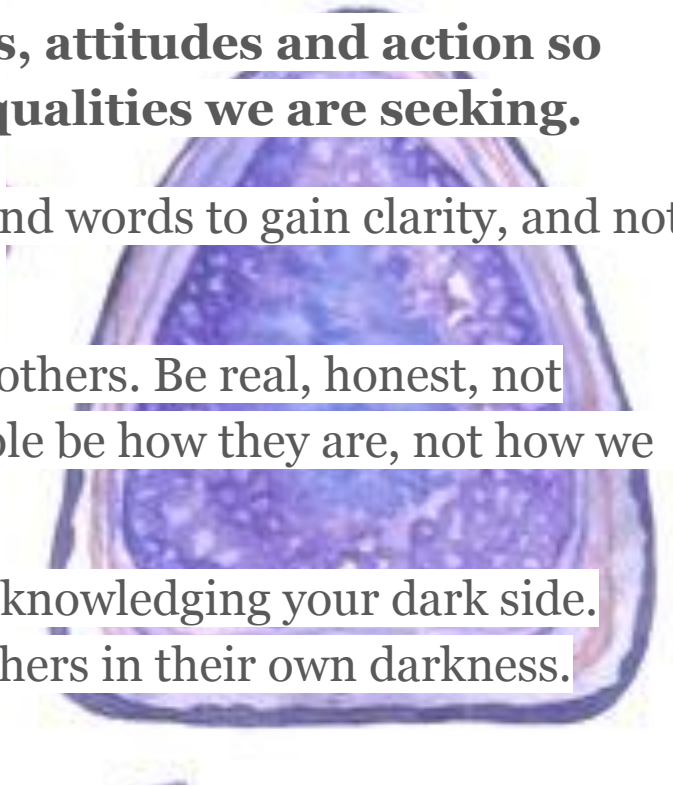
1. Purity (sauca)
2. Contentment (santosa)
3. Discipline (tapas)
4. Self study (svadhyaya)
5. Surrender (isvara-pranidhana)



The Sixth Jewel: Purity (Saucha)

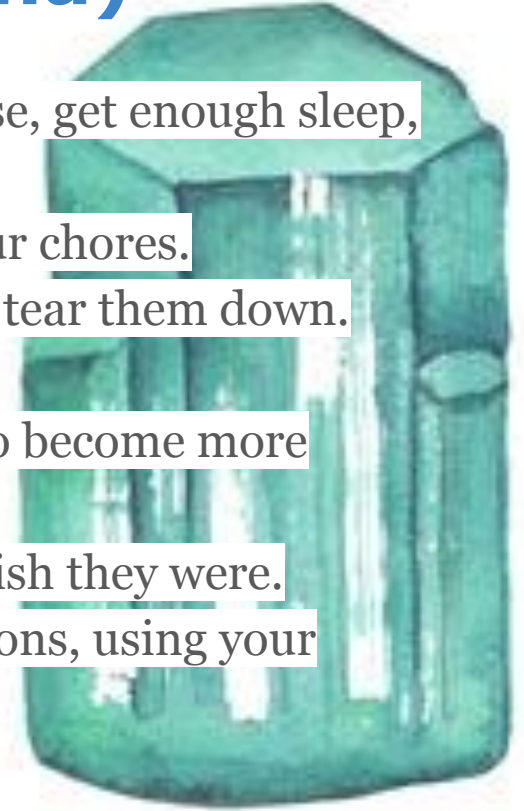
An invitation to clean up our bodies, minds, attitudes and action so that we can become more available to the qualities we are seeking.

- First aspect: cleanse body, home, thoughts, and words to gain clarity, and not feel weighed down, distracted or scattered.
- Second aspect: purify our relationships with others. Be real, honest, not controlling. Let each moment and other people be how they are, not how we want them to be.
- Third aspect: loving yourself how you are. Acknowledging your dark side. Then you can be a person who can sit with others in their own darkness.



How to Practice Purity (Saucha)

1. Take care of your health. Eat nourishing 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 and stale.
4. Slow down. Give each task you undivided attention to become more integrated and pure in each moment.
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 practices and journaling.



The Seventh Jewel: Contentment (Santosh)

Invites us to practice gratitude for what we have, accept reality for what it is, and agree to what is happening in the moment.

- Addresses our tendency to grasp at the next thing to make us happy, and our chronic dissatisfaction with the present moment.
- What about when things are bad? Contentment still asks us to resist twisting away from it, suffering the disillusionment that there can be something different in the moment.
- Dukha vs. Sukha. Dukha is resisting, rejecting, hiding from what's happening. Sukha doesn't mean that you are always happy, but it does mean you are present.



How to Practice Contentment (Santosh)

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.

The Power of Gratitude

“If the only prayer you ever say in your life is ‘Thank You,’
that would be enough.

-Meister Eckhart

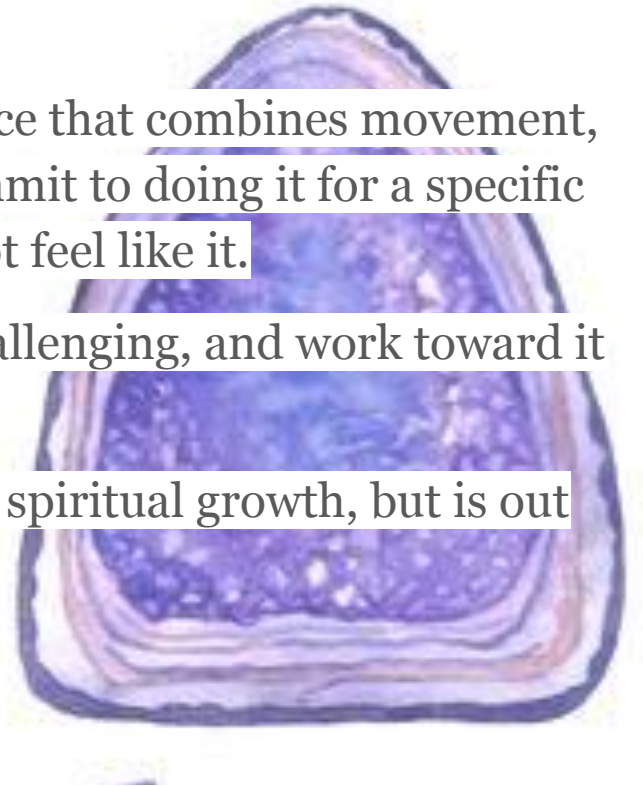
The Eighth Jewel: Discipline (Tapas)

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.

- To become someone greater in the future, you have to put forth the effort. That effort helps “burn up” what is getting in the way of your growth.
- Tapas is the determined effort to become someone of character and strength.
- Times of hardship or crisis when we feel that everything is being burned. Yet, these times shape us into people of strength. The debris is burned away. You gain wisdom, realize what is really important, and don't take things for granted. These times leave us changed and perhaps permanently scarred, but also weave something profound in us.

How to Practice Discipline (Tapas)

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 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.



The right choice is not always easy

“Each moment is a clear choice of right action. Quite often the choices that prepare us for the fire are the choices against immediate pleasure.”

-Deborah Adele, *The Yamas and Niyamas*

The Ninth Jewel: Self-Study (Svadhyaya)

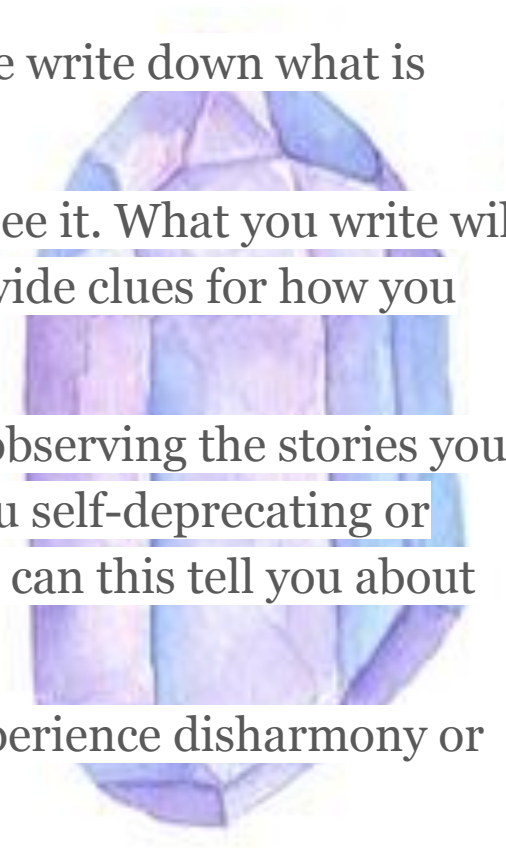
A belief that we are each good at our core, combined with the process of unpacking our layers of personality, prejudices, opinions that cloud over the Light of the Soul.

- Self-study involves noticing your thoughts and actions (de-linking the chain) and reflecting on why you do the things you do.
- How you could start to act more from your Divine core: truth, purity, beauty and justice in your speech, behaviors and actions?
- We have already started practicing self-study by observing our thoughts as the Witness in meditation practice.



How to Practice Self-Study (Svadhyaya)

1. Spend a little time journaling, daily or weekly. Simply 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.



The Tenth Jewel: Surrender (Ishvara Pranidhana)

Asks us to go with the flow of life, to stop trying to control everything, and to surrender to something greater.

- Presupposes the existence of God, and that our lives are infused with a Divine Force.
- Yet, people who are atheist or agnostic can still surrender to the Greater Good by putting values like truth, justice and love above their personal desires.
- Asks us to stop needing things to be a certain way, and to look for the chance to grow from everything in life. God is in everything.
- Surrender does not mean throwing our hands up, giving up in the face of evil.



Surrender: Dietrich Bonhoeffer

German pastor and anti-Nazi activist who was sent to a concentration camp and eventually killed for speaking out.

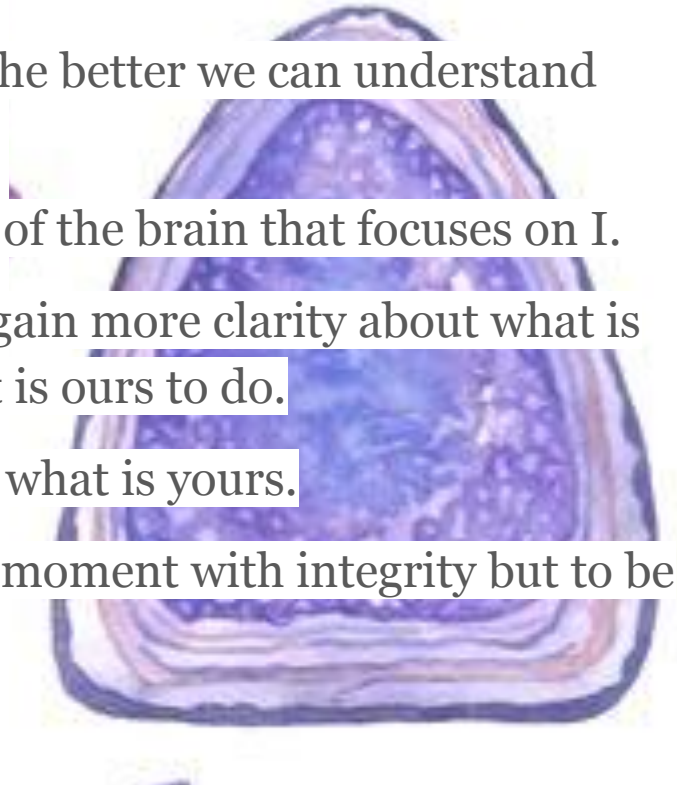
“Surrender” was not accepting what the Nazis were doing and giving up. Rather, it meant surrendering his life to what was right.

Surrender calls us something higher than ourselves, even when it costs something.



Surrender: The Crown Jewel!

- The more we practice the other nine jewels, the better we can understand what it means to surrender.
- Meditation helps, because it shrinks the part of the brain that focuses on I.
- 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.
- Release what is not yours to do, and work on what is yours.
- Strong + Soft. Strong enough to engage each moment with integrity but to be soft enough to flow with the current of life.



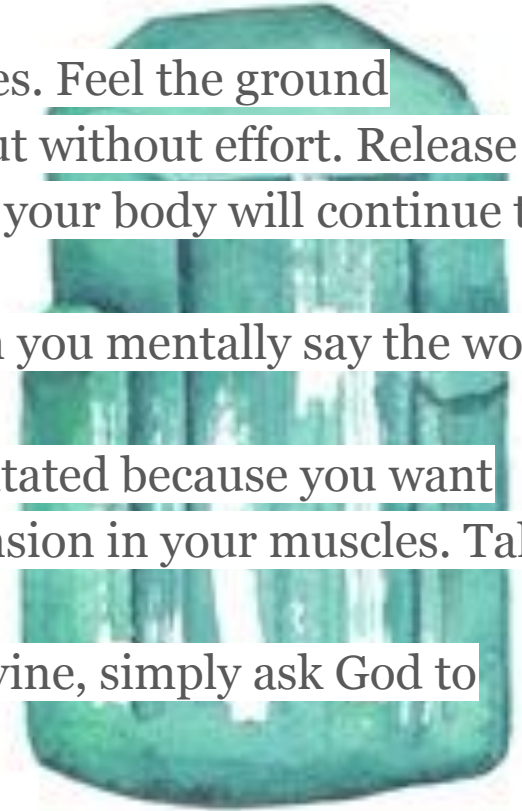
A Clue about Surrender

“Ultimately there is nothing I can tell you about surrender, except having nothing and wanting nothing. Not keeping score, not trying to be richer, not being afraid of losing, not being particularly interested in our own personality. Choosing to be happy no matter what happens to us. These are some of the clues. The rest we learn with practice and grace.”

-Swami Chidananda

How to Practice Surrender

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.



Transforming Yourself 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.
- Mindfulness practices, including but not exclusively meditation, helps us develop sharper awareness, and more sensitivity to our thoughts and emotions. Pay attention to your life!