“Ashtanga Yoga: Niyama”

The second limb of Ashtanga Yoga
as taught by Maharishi Patanjali

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**Niyama: The second limb of Ashtanga Yoga**

Niyamas are regulations, or personal directives. We can think of them as personal responsibilities that direct our life to flow in specific ways. Patanjali mentions 5 Niyamas:

1. **Saucha**, cleanliness or purity,
2. **Santosha**, Contentment,
3. **Tapas**, or austerity,
4. **Svadhyaya**, or self-study,
5. **Iswara Pranidhana**, or special devotion to God.

**II.32 शौचसन्तोषस्तपाःस्वाभ्यासप्रणिधानांनियमः:**
śauca-santoṣa-tapaḥ-svādhyāyeśvāra-prāṇidhānāni niyamāh

The 5 Niyamas are:

1. Saucha, cleanliness or purity,
2. Santosha, Contentment,
3. Tapas, or austerity,
4. Svadhyaya, or self-study,
5. Iswara Pranidhana, or special devotion to God.

**Saucha** is purity in thoughts, words and action. It is also purity in the body and our surroundings by keeping them clean. Anything that is a mixture is deemed impure.

**Santosha** is contentment. It is being free of the feeling of lack or inadequacy. Some students ask how Santosha is different from laziness or lack of drive. Here is the key – one can be in a space of contentment yet dynamic in the action. Inner peace and outer dynamisk (IPOD) is the key!

**Tapas** literally means to heat. It refers to austerity in order to purify the system and strengthen the system. Tapas is of 3 types – of the thoughts, words and action. Offer thought, words, action only that are uplifting to oneself and others.

**Svadhyaya** is self-study. It involves self-awareness and observing our thoughts, emotions and sensations in the body. We can use these as indicators that can guide us towards harmony.
Iswara Pranidhana is special devotion to the divine.

What are the benefits of engaging in the 5 Niyamas?

II.40 शौचात्मक स्वातंत्र्यमार्गाधिकारिणाम्
śauca-tāt sukha-lābhaḥ
Purity brings awareness to the fact that we are different from the body. In other words, we are able to recognize who we are in the pure form, uncontaminated by mixing the identity of the body.

II.41 सत्त्वसुधासुमनस्यायकाधिपृष्ठाः
sattva-sūdha-saumanasyaikāgṛyādhīna-jayāma-darsṇa-yogatvāni ca
Purity leads to Satva Shuddhi, pleasant mind (soumanasya), onepointedness (ekagra), mastery over our senses (indriya jaya), and the prerequisite to see our true identity (atma darsana yogatva).

II.42 सन्तोषपरततत्ततः सुखनलोऽपि
santoṣād anuttamah sukha-lābhaḥ
Contentment brings infinite Joy.

II.43 कायंद्रिय-सिद्धिश्वसुधार्थपत्तय
kāyendriya-siddhir asuddhi-kṣayāt tapasaḥ
Tapas leads to removal of impurities (Ashuddhi Kshaya) and strengthening the system (Kayendra siddhi).

II.44 स्वाध्याययात्रेदेवतासप्रयोगः
svādhyāyaḥ īśa-devatā-samprayogaḥ
By self-study, we have the communion towards Devas. (It is described in Ayurvedic texts that different physiological processes are controlled by different Devas).
Iswara Pranidhana leads to Samadhi, or evenness in consciousness.
Let us conclude with a Prayer on Maharishi Patanjali:

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\begin{align*}
\text{योगेन चित्तस्य, पदेन वाचा} & \quad \text{मलं शरीरस्य च वैष्णवे} | \\
yogena cittasya, padena vacam & \quad \text{malam sharirasya ca vaidyakena} | \\
\text{योपाकरोत तं प्रवरं मुनीना} & \quad \text{पतञजलिः प्राणमिति आनतोस्मि} || \\
yo’pakarot tam pravaram muninaam & \quad \text{patañjalim prañamim anato’smi} || \\
\text{आबाहु पुरुषाकारं} & \quad \text{शास्त्रक्रासि धारिणम्} | \\
\text{abahu purusakaram} & \quad \text{sankhacakrasim dharinam} | \\
\text{सहस्र शिरसं शैतं} & \quad \text{प्रणामाति पतञजलिः} || \\
sahasra shirasam svetam & \quad \text{pranamami patañjalim} ||
\end{align*}
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**Meaning:**

“I offer reverence to the eminent sage Patañjali, who removed the impurities of the mind through yoga, of speech through grammar, and of the body through medicine.”

“The upper body of human shape, holding a conch (divine sound), discuss (wheel of time) and sword (discrimination), I bow down to the white (pure) thousand-headed (elevated awareness), I respectfully bow to Patanjali.”