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ON : An analysis on the contemporary relevance of the Yamas and Niyamas

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## Abstract:

The Yoga is a school of Philosophy that was originally founded by the Sage Patanjali. Taking materials about yoga philosophy from ancient traditions, Maharishi Patanjali, sage scientist and propounder of yoga, wrote 196 sutras (aphorisms) on yoga around 400 CE, popularly known as Patanjali's Yoga Sutra. The Yogasutra is not just body postures and breathing techniques to calm your mind down, or to improve your physical fitness, but a holistic Philosophy to unite the body, mind and soul, along with living a socially fulfilling and an ethical life.

As the Yoga primarily asserts on, योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः which means that Yoga is the cessation of the distractions of the mind. We the human beings have body, sense organs, and mind, hence, it is obvious to have sensual attachment and passion towards worldly objects. As a result, we have drawn in the river of bondage and worldly sufferings. To get rid of earthly suffering and to remove the ignorance that find within us, we have to conquer our sense organs, mind and even our bodily act. To do so the citta needs to be controlled. In this respect, yoga philosophy prescribes the eight-fold path which helps to control our passions and craving for worldly pleasures.

The Yoga Sutras are best known for its reference to ashtanga, eight elements of practice culminating in samadhi, concentration of the mind on an object of meditation, namely yama (abstinences), niyama (observances), asana (yoga postures), pranayama (breath control), pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses), dharana (concentration of the mind), dhyana (meditation) and samadhi (absorption). However, its main aim is kaivalya, discernment of purusha, the witness-conscious, as separate from prakriti, the cognitive apparatus, and disentanglement of purusha from prakriti's muddled defilements.

In this work, we study the first two dimensions of the Ashtanga (eight-limbed) Yoga: Yama and Niyama and bring out two important ideas: the first idea is of integral existence, and the second idea is of pursuance of excellence. While the Yama inputs reinforce coexistence and collocative Niyama inputs emphasize discipline - first at the body level and then at the level of mind we try to evaluate and explain how Yama and Niyama inputs help change the mindset from “only my growth” to “my growth along with others.” Examining the philosophical underpinnings, we explain that Yama and Niyama inputs, while seemingly working at an individual level, lay the foundation of a collective level, and how are they still relevant even though they were written thousands of years ago.

## Chapter 1:

### Introduction:

(In ancient times study of shastra was done under guru pupil tradition, which is where the word Upanisad stems from, which means learning by sitting close to the Guru. Prior to study of Shastras the pupil was taught fundamental education so that he could very well understand the subject. The learning happened through a dialogue between the guru and the pupil where a pupil would have queries and the guru would answer those queries as and when required and a balance would be maintained throughout the learning process. To study the first sutra of the Yoga darshan 'Atha Yogaanushasnam' one wants to know 'What is Yoga?' The sentence "Now let us begin the Discipline of Yoga" gives rise to the query 'what is yoga?' Maharshi Patanjali defines Yoga as stilling the fluctuations of mind. This is a complete, brief and meaningful definition. To understand Yoga in entirety one must know what is mind, vritti and nirudh. The original and the actual meaning of Yoga cannot be understood without understanding this, which covers the aspect of Yoga Psychology, as Datta and Chatterjee fondly call it. The mind- in simple words refers to the land where our thoughts are born, formed and remain firm as sacraments. Hence, we find the earthly sufferings (klesas) namely Avidya (ignorance), Asmita (egoism), Raga (attachment), Dwesa (Aversion), Abhinivesa (clinging for long life and fear of death). There are several causes responsible for these disturbances in the citta. Among those a few are; attachment with objects of the world, cognizing the objects wrongly, inactivity, doubt, carelessness, etc. Patanjali also justifies how one can attain the final aim of life that is Moksha, through the eightfold path that was very thoughtfully put forward by him.

The Yamas and Niyamas, elucidated by the sage Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras thousands of years ago, form the ethical and moral framework of yoga practice. Yamas, the first limb of Ashtanga Yoga, encompass universal ethical principles that govern our interactions with the external world, while Niyamas, the second limb, delve into personal observances that foster self-discipline and inner strength. Together, they offer a blueprint for conscious living, guiding practitioners toward a life of integrity, compassion, and spiritual growth. This paper shows how the two main limbs of Yoga, Yama (Social Discipline) and Niyama (Individual Discipline) are helpful in building a good personality and a good society as a whole. Yoga is the spiritual science for integrated and holistic development of our physical, mental, social and moral spiritual aspect of being. Thus Yoga gifts us the practice to be pro-active without aggression. Yoga is a technique for a self mastery overcoming anger, pride, jealousy and hatred. When Yama and Niyama are properly practiced, it offers help and insight in to our relationship including our responsibility and role in them. The combination of Yama and Niyama help boost compassion, gratitude, happiness and self discipline. However, their relevance in today's times is very crucial, and is a topic worth studying and analysing.

The first two stages of Ashtanga Yoga are called Yama and Niyama- these pre-requisites establish the expected behavior and thought patterns that would keep the individual in harmony with the cosmos. The primary purpose of this article is to expand on the important role played by Yama and Niyama, and therefore these two concepts will be explained in detail in the following sections.

## Chapter 2:

### What is the Yoga Philosophy?

The Yoga philosophy speaks about the theory and practice for the realization of the ultimate truth concerning human being and the world. In Vedanta, yoga is understood as 'union', i.e. spiritual union of the individual soul with the supreme soul. This view is not explained clearly. Patanjali, who is the founder of the Yoga System says, yoga is a spiritual effort to attain perfection through the control of sense organs, gross body, subtle mind, intellect and ego. It guides to achieve the highest wisdom through spiritual realization. Patanjali's 'Yoga-sutras' are the first and foremost systematic and authoritative presentations of yoga in both its theoretical and practical aspects. Followed by Patanjali, Vyasas's "Yoga-bhasya" and Vacaspati Mishra's 'Tattva-vaisaradi" are the good additions to Yoga philosophy. These two works are treated as commentaries on Yoga-sutras.

The Yoga Philosophy is closely associated with Samkhya philosophy. The Yoga presents a practical path for the realization of the self whereas the Samkhya emphasizes the attainment of knowledge of self by means of concentration and meditation. Thus, it won't be incorrect to state that yoga is the practice and Samkhya is its theory. The Gita says that Yoga and Samkhya are the practical and theoretical sides of the same system. The Yoga Sutras are organised into four parts, which includes everything from the purification of the mind (citta) to flexibility of the body to the cause of suffering to the path of liberation by eradication of your karmas. (which is the final goal of almost every orthodox school of Indian Philosophy).

Psychological foundation is the prerequisite to understand the path of yoga. In other words, a basic understanding of psychology helps to understand the path of yoga in a clear form. Thus, we need to understand in a priority basis 'what is psychology of yoga?'. The most important element in the psychology of yoga is citta. 'Citta' means the three internal organs as described in the Samkhya philosophy- buddhi or intellect, ahamkara or ego, and manas or mind. It is the first modifications of the Prakriti in which sattva guna dominates rajas and tamas. It is material by nature, but due to nearness or closeness with the Purusa, it acquires consciousness. But when it relates to an object, it assumes the 'form' of that object. This form is called Vritti or modification. Due to the modifications of Citta, the self knows the worldly objects. There is no real or actual modification occurred in the self. But due to the reflection of the Purusa in the modifications of Citta, there is an appearance of change found in it. Just as the moon appears as moving in the river and waves of the river appear as luminous, similarly Purusa appears as undergoing modifications and citta appears as conscious due to Purusa's reflection in it. When the knowledge of an object is attained the self ceases to exist from the modifications of Citta. It even detached from the association and aversion of the worldly joys and pain. This attachment and aversion is nothing but 'bondage'. To get rid from these bondage human beings need to control the modifications of citta. One can control the modifications of citta only by practicing yoga in continuous manner. In this regard, Patanjali defines yoga as the cessation of the modification of citta.

Stages of Citta There are five stages of citta called as 'citta bhumi'. 1. Ksipta (Restless) This is the first-stage of citta. In this stage citta is very much distributed and attached with worldly

objects. For example, Citta of those intoxicated by the possession of power and money. 2. Mudha (Torpida) In this stage, tamas dominates the other two gunas; sattva and rajasa. This stage of citta is known as mudha. For example, citta of the intoxicated persons. 3. Viksipta (Distracted) This is the third stage of citta where sattva guna dominates the other two gunas. In this stage yoga begins and citta tries to attain god or supreme soul. Due to the sattva dominance, it is found that there is temporary ceasing of the modifications of the citta. 4. Ekagra (concentrated) This is the fourth stage of Citta. In this stage, citta is fixed to some object due to the sattva preponderance. It is known as ekagra. For example, the flame of a candle light remains always pointing up without flicking hither and thither. 5. Whereas the last i.e the Niruddha or Restricted is the fifth and final stage of citta is niruddha. In this stage the impressions remain in the citta after the cessation of modifications. This stage is known as yoga.

The citta gets modified or change and acquires consciousness due to the reflection of the Purusa or the self. But the real nature of citta is material. The changes in citta are known as modifications of Vrttis, which go about like Pramana Yoga school, like Samkhya adheres to three pramanas. These are; perception, inference and sabda (verbal testimony). In the case of perception, the citta through sense organs (both external and internal) comes into contact with external objects of the world and assumes its form. In case of inference, the citta cognizes the generic nature of objects and this is equally applicable to verbal testimony also, Viparyaya The expression 'Viparyaya' is understood as 'doubt'. To possess not determinate knowledge of an object is known as doubt. For example, seeing an object and not able to cognize whether it is a shell or a silver is resulted in doubt, Vikalpa It is the knowledge in which the object is known but the object does not exist. Thus, it is treated it as merely a verbal cognition, the child of a barren woman for instance, Nidra also known as sleep in the layman's terms, is a mental modification where there will be no cognition. In this stage, the citta is predominated by tamas. However, this stage won't ignore the mild presence of knowledge while some body is in sleep. This is so because after waking up from sleep the person has consciousness; for example: that (s)he had slept well and knew nothing. Thus, some sorts of modifications are occurred even in sleep. Memory or smrti is the recapitulation or recollection of past experiences. Recapitulation is possible through our impressions that we have left on the objects while cognized. Thus in this stage some sorts of modifications are found in citta.

Along with these states of mind, Patanjali also gives a list of the Kleshas which are primarily responsible for the disturbance of our mind and body, and their reasons for being what they are, and later also elaborates on how to overcome it : They include Avidya or ignorance, which arises when we cognizing the self as non-eternal and material. But the real nature of the self is bliss, eternal, and possesses pure consciousness. Asmita is wrongly identifying the duality between two objects, for instance between the Purusa and Prakrti, and further, bringing them in an equal platform. But in reality, purusa and Prakrti are two distinct entities, and can't be equated with each other. Raga is the craving that one has to attain worldly pleasure like power, money, etc. Dwesa is anger in the means of suffering. The last, abhinivesa is fear of death which finds among all living beings in the earth.

Lastly, Patanjali talks about the eightfold path, also known as Ashtanga Marg, to overcome and (try to) get rid of the Kleshas and attain what is called as the ultimate goal of human life that is liberation. The eight fold path consists of the following: i) Yama ii) Niyama iii) Asana iv) Pranayama v) Pratyahara vi) Dharana vii) Dhyana viii) Samadhi.

The Ashtanga Yoga, or the eight-fold path of Yoga, which is the gist of Patanjali's Yoga philosophy, provides a solution that touches various dimensions. Yoga practices make a fundamental change in the way a person perceives this world. They influence the attitude and lifestyle of a person. Yoga interventions operate not only on skill development or at the cognitive level but also at a much deeper consciousness level. Yoga practices encompass an applied philosophy that involves contemplative states of consciousness, which will be spoken of later, in detail.

In the existing modern literature, Yoga is mostly taken as a combination of breathing, body postures, and meditation. However, the idea of Yoga is much broader and goes beyond mere physical exercises. DiStasio (2008) mentions that the union of the body, mind, and spirit differentiates Yoga from general exercise programs. Adhia et al. (2010) agree with the above and point out that Yoga practices "encompass cognitive learning, moral conduct, physiological practices, and psychological therapy." Sri Aurobindo described Yoga as the union of (individual) consciousness soul with the Divine's consciousness and delight.

In the rich tapestry of yoga philosophy, the concept of liberation, known as "moksha" or "mukti," occupies a central and profound place. Rooted in ancient Vedic texts and expounded upon in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, liberation represents the ultimate goal of yoga practice – the attainment of freedom from the cycles of suffering and the realization of one's true nature. At its core, liberation in yoga philosophy transcends mere physical or material liberation. Instead, it signifies liberation from the bondage of ignorance (avidya) and the limitations of the egoic mind (ahamkara), leading to a state of profound spiritual awakening and union with the divine. The various steps that take a person close to Moksha are the last six of the Ashtanga Marg, namely Asana (Physical Postures), Pranayama (Breath control), Dharana (Concentration), Dhyana (Meditation), Svadhaya (Self study) and the last (and probably the most significant of them all), Ishwara Pranidhan which means surrendering to the divine, because it allows the practitioner to transcend the limitations of the ego and align with the divine flow of existence, at the end of the divine eightfold path as given by Patanjali. Ultimately, liberation in yoga philosophy is not a destination to be reached but a state of being to be realized. It is the recognition of the eternal, unchanging essence (atman) within oneself and the realization of oneness with the cosmic consciousness (Brahman). In this state of liberation, the individual transcends the dualities of pleasure and pain, gain and loss, and experiences unbounded peace, joy, and unconditional love. While liberation may seem like a very heavy and complex a subject to be talked about, its essence permeates every aspect of yoga practice, guiding practitioners on a transformative journey of self-discovery, awakening, and spiritual evolution. As one delves deeper into the teachings of yoga philosophy and applies its principles in daily life, the pursuit of liberation becomes not only a lofty ideal but a tangible and transformative reality, leading to greater fulfillment, meaning, and liberation in every moment of existence, which is where it is also brought to our notice how Patanjali's concept of Moksha coincides with that of Buddha, who also believed that one need not necessarily die in order to attain liberation, and that it can be achieved in this very lifetime, if all the conditions to do so are met in the correct manner, and with the right mindset.

## Chapter 3:

### The Yamas and Niyamas as given by Patanjali:

Yoga philosophy and practice, as mentioned earlier, were first described by Patanjali in the classic text, *Yoga Sutras*, which is widely acknowledged as the authoritative text on yoga. Today, many people identify yoga only with asana, the physical practice of yoga, but asana is just one of the many tools used for healing the individual; only three of the 196 sutras mention asana and the remainder of the text discusses the other components of yoga including conscious breathing, meditation, lifestyle and diet changes, visualization and the use of sound, among many others. In *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali outlines an eightfold path to awareness, enlightenment and liberation called *ashtanga*, which literally means “eight limbs”

A 3,000 year old tradition, yoga, is now regarded in the Western world as a holistic approach to health and is classified by the National Institutes of Health as a form of Complementary and Alternative Medicine. The word “yoga” comes from a Sanskrit root “yuj” which means union, or yoke, to join, and to direct and concentrate one's attention. Regular practice of yoga helps promotes strength, endurance, flexibility and facilitates characteristics of friendliness, compassion, and greater self-control, while cultivating a sense of calmness and well-being. While the long term effects of religiously practicing/following the eightfold path leads to significant positive outcomes such as changes in life perspective, self-awareness and an improved sense of energy to live life fully and with genuine enjoyment. The practice of yoga produces a physiological state opposite to that of the flight-or-fight stress response and with that interruption in the stress response, a sense of balance as well as a union between the mind and body can be achieved.

The Yamas are about moving beyond personal benefits, inculcating a fraternal mindset and a deeprooted moral living. Yamas convey the idea of reverence and resonance with the surroundings. Yamas are guidelines or recommendations for the without (whereas Niyamas are about the within).

The eight limbs are comprised of ethical principles for living a meaningful and purposeful life; serving as a prescription for moral and ethical conduct and self-discipline, they direct attention towards one's health while acknowledging the spiritual aspects of one's nature. Any of the eight limbs may be used separately, but within yoga philosophy the physical postures and breathing exercises prepare the mind and body for meditation and spiritual development. Based on Patanjali's eight limbs, many different yogic disciplines have been developed. Each has its own technique for preventing and treating disease, and also to save oneself from developing mental or psychological disorders or issues, which can be due to actions, thoughts or behaviours like acquiring something that does not belong to you, or never being satisfied with what one has, or keep pretending to be someone who one originally is not for whatsoever reason, etc.



The Yamas include:

Yama essentially means the control of mind, body, and speech.

The five yamas are:

**Ahimsa:** It means to accept the principle of non-violence. It upholds that not to kill or do any injuries to any living beings. The word ahimsa means to injure or show cruelty to any creature or any person in any way whatsoever. Ahimsa not only means non-violence in other words, kindness, friendliness and thoughtful consideration of other people and things. With this, Patanjali also means how one should not discriminate between the caste, creed, religion, race, economic status etc. And emphasizes on being kind and compassionate to everyone, regardless of anything. This also takes into account swearing and cussing, and how, if one has to be and excel on the path of yoga, must strictly refrain himself from hurting anyone, be it physically or even verbally for that matter.

Yoga also states further that even thinking ill of someone is also a himsa, which is mental himsa. Hence, ahimsa covers all aspects such as physical, oral, mental. This indicates the greatness of the depth of the science of yoga. Patanjali Yoga aphorism states the results of following such ahimsa:

अहिंसा प्रतिष्ठायं तत्सन्निधौ वैरात्यगः ॥

One, who observes ahimsa, succeeds in eliminating feelings of enmity. If ahimsa is followed for a long time, not only the sadhak, but even his surroundings are affected and enmity is eliminated in the minds of all who come in contact with him. Thus, ahimsa is not only elimination of physical, mental, oral hurt, but also wiping out the feelings of enmity. Thus, for Yoga studies such high degree ahimsa is prescribed. However, not all Yoga Sadhak aspire for Samadhi. Their expectations from the yoga studies are limited. From their point of view such great ahimsa may not be able to be observed continuously. Hence, in day-to-day life it should be considered how far such ahimsa is to be observed. Those who desire to progress further in Yoga should shun all himsa. Initially, one may not be able to observe total ahimsa. However, one should constantly keep the definition of ahimsa in mind and try to follow it. Mind and the body can be trained to avoid such activity. Such training is the first step towards following ahimsa entirely.

According to Patanjali, when a Yogi obtains the Goal of ahimsa, all other creature living around him begin to develop feelings of animosity because of the tranquil movement and surroundings of the place.

One such example is that of Vijay Muni ji, a renowned Jain monk, whose ashram was one such place where the creatures who in the usual sense are predators of each other, and are constantly at war in the wild; be it to obtain food, like Tigers, Cheetahs on one side, whereas deers and dogs on the other for instance, where one chases the other and most probably kills the weaker animal, however, in his ashram, all of these animals very peacefully co-existed with one another, without a single instance of preying on or killing each other, and this is where we get

to see real-life examples of what Patanjali had mentioned in his sutras, and how it can be a reality.

**Satya:** Satya or truth says that to speak the truth and adhere to truth even in your thinking. And even though Patanjali was very clear how falsehood should be completely avoided at all costs, at the same time, yet it is not always positive to speak the truth on all occasions, for it could harm someone unnecessarily. If speaking the truth have negative consequences for another person then it better to say nothing. Truthfulness also means to honestly accept examine ourselves because we will be at great loss if we keep pretending to be someone who we are not, be it because of an reason. So here, truthfulness not only means to speak the truth at (almost ) all times, but also to be true to oneself. Also, God has created our tongue for the benefit of all and not for destruction. So the truth, which results in the destruction of someone or something, is also not the truth. According to Patanjali.

**Asteya:** It upholds the principle non-stealing. Steya means theft. Asteya means not stealing anything. However, asteya has a comprehensive meaning and is not limited to not stealing something from the other and keeping it in possession. It means not keeping anything with self, which does not belong to the self. The pressure generated in the of staling something that does not belong to you does have bad effects on the body and the internal glands. If asteya is observed, the body and the mind do not have to undergo such strain. This is the meaning and conclusion of asteya. One should know what belongs to him/her, and should never try to forcefully attain something that legally or ethically does not belong to him.

**Brahmacharya:** It is known as celibacy. Here one needs to control his/her senses towards the attachment of heavenly pleasures. It restrains somebody for not having sexual life. We must understand Brahmacharya in the wider sense of a life of discipline in every respect, which is conducive to the spiritual progress, leads to the gain of vigour, energy and virility. A discipline life itself means keeping everything in its proper and optimal limit. Bramhacharya not only instills self-control, but self discipline at the same time, the relevance and significance of which will be elaborated further.

**Aparigraha:** Is the last of all the Yamas, wherein a Yoga practitioner is advised to have moderation and control on sensory pleasures – a proactive attempt to get personal mastery. Aparigraha, in simple terms means not to accept and aspire for any sorts of unnecessary lavish things in excess amounts; for life enjoyment, be it of money, gold or any such thing. It conveys the message of neutralizing the desire to acquire and hoard wealth. This is the opposite of parigraha. Parigraha is covetousness or greed. Aparigraha is the mental state in which sensual craving is dead, parigraha leads to anxiety to preserve, fear of loss, hatred, anger, untruthfulness stealing, delusion, pride. Whereas Aparighraha helps us feel more at peace, and we tend to be satisfied with what we have at the moment, and we also be grateful for what we have, rather than cribbing for what we do not or cannot have. Aparigraha also means to take only what is necessary. We should only take what we have earned. As the Yogi feels that the collection or hoarding of things creates problems in their yogi practice.

While the Niyamas include:

Niyama means "rules" or "laws." These are the rules prescribed for personal observance. Like the yamas, the five niyamas are not exercises or actions to be simply studied. They represent far more than an attitude. Compared with the yamas, the niyamas are more intimate and personal. They refer to the attitude we adopt toward ourselves as we create a code for living soulfully

**Saucha:** It is also known as purification of the body, by maintaining cleanliness and taking pure or satwik food, through which our body remains clean, healthy and presentable. Saucha does not mean detachment from one's own body, in fact it means to be attached to it, and take utmost care of it, not only externally, but internally too. External or 'Bahya' purity generates internal purity. For example – netikriya and dhoutikriya cleans your body and helps detoxify it; as we know that a healthy mind is always in a healthy body. Internal purity includes removal of lust, anger, greed, jealousy etc, and even though Patanjali gave importance to external purification and cleanliness, he also asserted that purification of yourself internally by getting rid of these emotions and feelings that (almost) drain you mentally and do more harm than good, is what matters the most.

While considering outer purity, Hathayoga describes many processes right from brushing the teeth. The specific powder (churna) that should be used for cleaning the teeth is also mentioned under Shuddhikriya in Hatha yoga. Whereas for external purity, yoga has given the message that one should not talk too much. Unnecessary use of the tongue is to be avoided and following the yama should purify the tongue.

This is because Yoga has accepted the inseparable relation of the body and the mind. Hence, each and every yogic process affects the body as well as the mind.

**Santosha:** Is a term we use (almost) on a daily basis, and is understood as contentment. It means to be satisfied with yourself whatever you attain or possess. In other words, "what you have, you must be happy with that". Contentment is the source of joys of the best order, and real contentment helps reduce (and gradually eradicate) all types of desires, which is said to be the root cause of all suffering. Contentment is also an important virtue. When we observe the never-ending efforts of all creatures in their day-to-day lives, and think of the purpose behind it, we realise that all these efforts are to gain mental contentment and peace. We try to derive the contentment from outside matters. However, none is aware of the fact that the contentment does not depend upon these outside matters. It is a state of mind. It is not a reaction of the mind on any incident. Hence, it can be controlled irrespective of the incidents. Yoga with the use of this word intends the hidden meaning that one should learn to be happy in what one gets. This attitude will reduce pain and suffering in life. However, there should be mental preparation for this. When this tendency to feel contented is adopted by the mind, the perpetual happiness is not far behind.

In fact the root of happiness lies in this tendency of the mind. And the root cause of suffering is in Trishna (thirst). This trishna has been defined in one Sanskrit shloka as under:

आशा नम मनुष्यानमकचितदाश्वर्यश्रृंखला |

याया बद्धा प्रधावन्ति मुक्तस्तिष्ठतिपाङ्गुवत ||

Hope is such a chain that when tied with it, the creature starts running and when released from it, the creature stands peacefully. Running behind the hope will only lead to pain and suffering.

Patanjali has given the following aphorism while describing the results of the contentment:

सन्तोषदनुत्तमसुखलभः|

Which means, one who constantly learns to be contented, all his thirst gets weakened and the satva is heightened. He gets the maximum happiness and feels that pleasures from heavens or even the place of the God Indra is also nothing as compared to his own bliss.

**Tapas or penance** : Tapa means to bear some trouble with a good intention. Even if there is some physical or mental trouble, one should not discontinue his actions, but should continue them. This is known as Tapa. While studying Yoga or practising some yogic process, there may be some physical trouble. One should bear it happily and should pursue his studies. This is tapa. Patanjali has stated the results of the tapa in the following aphorism

कायेन्द्रियसिद्धिरशुद्धिक्षयतपः

Ashuddhi is adharma. It is a tamas guna. It is impurity, which veils the siddhis such as Anima. The daily practice and study of tapa , after its completion, removes all such impurities. Behind the notion of tapas lies the idea we can direct our energy to enthusiastically engage life and achieve our ultimate goal of creating union with the Divine. Tapas helps us burn up all the desires that stand in our way of this goal. Another form of tapas is paying attention to what we eat. Attention to body posture, attention to eating habits, attention to breathing patterns - these are all tapas.

**Swadhaya**: The fourth niyama is svadhyaya. Sva means "self" adhyaya means "inquiry" or "examination". Any activity that cultivates self-reflective consciousness can be considered svadhyaya. Swadhaya also means regular habit of the study of religious books to be particular; In general, study of all good literature which guides a person toward moral values, good conduct and righteousness. Swadhyaya also means self study, is not just study of religious book but also study of the self or self analysis, which leads to progress moral and spiritual life. Svadhyaya entails the study of scriptures, contemplation of philosophical teachings, and reflection on one's thoughts, emotions, and actions. By cultivating self-awareness, discernment, and insight into the nature of the self, individuals can break free from limiting beliefs and patterns, and align with their true purpose and potential. For the advanced studies in Yoga, sacrifice of sensory perceptions into the sense organs and sacrifice of sense organs into the mind (antakaran) is expected. With swadhyay of yoga this can be achieved. It means to intentionally find self-awareness in all our activities and efforts, even to the point of welcoming

and accepting our limitations. It teaches us to be centered and non-reactive to the dualities, to burn out unwanted and self-destructive tendencies.

**Ishwar Pranidhana** : Means surrender to god in other words total dedication of all thoughts and action to supreme. It includes true and sincere worship of god and complete dedication to him with full faith, love and devotion. The person who surrenders to god, his ego is gone. Datta and Chatterjee mention how Patanjali has staunch faith in the existence of God, and It is God and God alone who is eternally free from all defects, he is the immortal spirit who ever remains untouched by afflictions and actions, their effects and their impressions. He possesses a perfect nature, the like of which is not to be met anywhere. He is the supreme ruler of the world, has infinite knowledge and unlimited power, which is what distinguishes him from all other beings. It is the supreme Lord who, by his grace frees the devotee from all the evil and sins he has committed, and makes for him the attainment of Yoga as easy as possible, but having complete faith in him, totally surrendering and resigning to him with all our mind, thoughts and actions is one of the most important prerequisite for the last Niyama, it also instills in us a feeling of gratitude and gratefulness to the supreme being, and that only I am not solely responsible for my success, i.e, Ishwara-pranidhana mindset believes that my achievements are due to the support of many apart from one's direct inputs.

## Chapter 4:

### Contemporary Relevance of the Yamas and Niyamas:

After knowing what Patanjali meant when he put forward the Yamas and Niyamas, i.e. Patanjali's understanding of the Yamas and Niyamas, we will now try and understand their relevance in today's times, and how they can contribute to a much healthy, happy and fulfilling life. The Yamas and Niyamas lie at the heart of the Yoga philosophy. Its foundational ethical principles serve as guiding lights on the journey toward self-realization and inner peace. In our contemporary society, characterized by rapid technological advancements, social fragmentation, and environmental crisis, the relevance of the Yamas and Niyamas shines even brighter. As individuals navigate the complexities of modern life, the timeless wisdom embedded within these ancient principles offers profound insights and practical guidance for cultivating resilience, authenticity, and inner peace.

This project seeks to explore the enduring relevance of the Yamas and Niyamas in the context of our contemporary world. By delving into each principle with depth and nuance, we aim to elucidate their profound significance and practical applications in modern yoga practice and daily life. Through a multidimensional approach encompassing philosophical inquiry, experiential exploration, and real-world application, we endeavor to illuminate how these timeless teachings can empower individuals to navigate the complexities of the modern world with grace, wisdom, and compassion.

To begin with: We start with the **Yamas**:

The objective of yamas is to purify mind, breaking any of the yamas would disturb it. Observance of yama is for making the inner atmosphere better, and it should be done on 3 levels. These are kayika (by body), Vachika (by speech), and mansika (by mind). When these yamas are practiced without any exceptions of birth, region or time it becomes Mahavrata ie great vows. Which means yama can be practiced in all conditions without any excuse (be it caste or custom, place or an occasion). Sometimes a person may appear to break yama but his/her intentions are not to harm the person nor any selfish interest, such a breach is because of an unavoidable necessity and society's benefit like for instance a soldier fighting for justice and right cause or a surgeon operating a patient. What is the reason a person finds himself going against yama. Doing or making someone else do violence, stealing etc. or encouraging someone do the same is possible because of greed, anger, or affection. The three emotions can be of any degree, mild or intense but the result is always pain and misery.

**Ahimsa** is a Yama that people really need to practice, with people constantly being at war with each other, with its reasons being endless; from religion to money, to acquiring wealth and/or property, to brutally killing someone who comes in their way; even though this may be heard/read many-a-times. While on the bigger scale, countries constantly trying to attack each other for innumerable reasons is a concern that does not seem to reduce in anyway. The recent Israel-Palestine conflict stems from a complex web of historical, political, socioeconomic, and religious factors. Addressing the root causes of the conflict and advancing a just and sustainable resolution will require concerted efforts from both Israelis and Palestinians, as well as

meaningful engagement from the international community. Even though there were efforts from (almost) all countries to stop and prevent the war from doing any further damage to the respective countries and their citizens, most of which have not borne any fruit, because of the strong animosity between the two countries does not seem to end. Even though we are living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are still cases being fought in the court regarding domestic violence and physical abuse at home, with most number of victims being women. As Patanjali very thoughtfully said how by adding Ahimsa as a Yama, he does not mean to only put an end to doing any kind of physical harm to any living being, but he also emphasizes how we should strictly refrain from swearing and cussing, which is very prevalent among the youth of today, as a result of extensive social media use, and even a few “influencers” or ‘so called entertainers who not only promote, but also glorify the frequent use of numerous cuss words, anger and violence being portrayed as funny or comic; which is very harmful for children who are either in their teens, or even pre-teens for that matter, as it has a seep-seated impact on the mind of its audience, knowingly or unknowingly, who may grow up believing that anger is funny, whereas in reality, that is not the case, and developing such an attitude can be harmful, not only for the person, but also for the ones coming in contact with them. Thus, ahimsa is not merely a refrain from physical or aggressive action, but to be kind, compassionate, considerate and mindful of your thoughts, words and actions.

**Satya** holds primary importance in today’s world, In an era characterized by misinformation, fake news, and ethical dilemmas, the principle of Satya remains as pertinent as ever. It underscores the importance of honesty, transparency, and integrity in thought, speech, and action. Satya or being truthful is very important in today’s times, as dishonesty, cheating, lying and betraying are actions that are carried out extensively in relationships as well now-a-days. Be it during their job application, or interview, people lie (and cheat) in a lot of aspects, including their caste, religion, financial condition, place of residence, job, educational qualification, any physical or psychological ailments etc. This leads to a lot of confusion and chaos, fear and distrust for the other person and/or the organisation who was cheated on. To the extent that it can even destroy his/her life forever, and such an attitude or behaviour should strictly not be encouraged by anyone, anywhere. which is why Satya or being honest in whatever one does, is a Yama that is not only relevant, but also very crucial in today’s times. At the same time, one such feature of Satya also brings out the practicality aspect that Patanjali encouraged, i.e. instead of being adamant with his principles that truth should be spoken at all costs, at the same time he also asserted that, the truth that may cause harm to anyone in any manner, should not be spoken, at such times, remaining silent is the best option one can opt for. Thus, By fostering trust, accountability, and authenticity, practicing Satya nurtures meaningful relationships, promotes ethical leadership, and contributes to a more truthful and just society.

**Asteya** means to refrain from stealing, even something minor like a pen, from the workplace for example; as any wastage or destruction of resources is akin to stealing from present and future generations. With the times we are in now, wherein inflation is on an all-time high, prices of everything only and only seem to rise over the years, and in such a competitive world, keeping a check on your desires and limiting them is a necessity, Because in a consumer-driven culture marked by greed, exploitation, and inequality, the principle of Asteya offers a timely reminder of the importance of ethical conduct and respect for others' belongings and rights, this is where your culture and upbringing play an important role, as they shape how you look at things, and refrain from engaging in acts like stealing. It means not keeping anything with self,

which does not belong to the self. If one finds something lying on the street and picks it up thinking that no one has seen him and since that was lying on the street, and someone is bound to pick it up, then why not me, and then that also is a theft. Picking up or possessing something, which does not have any owner, is also a theft. When one sees some money lying on the deserted street, there is a desire to pick it up. The other mind says that why not pick it up, if not me, someone else is bound to pick it up. The battle of the two minds starts increasing the heartbeats. If the bad conscience wins, then the intelligence propels the body to pick it up. But yet the good conscience keeps on advising against it, which is for your own good in the long run. And this is exactly what Patanjali means when he asks you to practice Asteya. Because acquiring something that does not belong to you not only creates an imbalance in the economy, and is a major threat to sustainability.

What Patanjali meant when he told us to practice Brahmacharya was to keep a control on our desires, i.e. Brahmacharya is not only for yogis and gurus. Following it is very much necessary while living in the family to avoid coitus by mind, word and action. To control the sexual desires. With increasing instances of sexual abuse and rape, women are not feeling safe anywhere be it school, college, workplace, public place or their own home. Characterlessness, sexual abuse, sex trafficking have emerged in the strong form. Through brahmacharya, character can be developed in every person of society and women can walk freely in the dark as well.

Along with this, the Yoga practitioner is advised to have moderation and control sensory pleasures proactive attempt to get personal mastery. And this not only includes practicing celibacy, i.e. to have a control on one's sexual desires, but now having everything in moderation is to be counted as Brahmacharya, checking your phone, or being on your phone rather than doing what is more important at the moment even though you may be tempted to do so, or not prioritising in the right manner, wasting your energy on the wrong thing at the wrong time, etc. Thus, by following Brahmacharya, individuals can lead a much more efficient, fulfilling and productive life.

Aparigraha highlights the transient nature of material possessions and the importance of letting go of attachment and greed. Which is one of the main reasons for economic inequality, corruption, poverty and hunger in the society. On this planet human beings have unlimited desires and ambitions. We think of fame & money, and tend/wish to plan for our next seven generations. Man is always unsatisfied and unfulfilled, he wants more and more which leads to frustrations and mental tensions. Nobody is happy, even people with all the amenities in life. An ideal society is one in which human beings receive equal and balanced opportunities for education, employment and practical progress. Practice of aparigraha will ensure access of these resources to all. If you take corporate ethics for instance, the top management like the CEO, CFO, etc can do their part by equally, fairly and honestly distributing the profits of the company/business to each and every stakeholder, according to what each one deserves, and should file their taxes with the utmost honesty, instead of taking maximum of profits to your name, or giving it to somebody who is undeserving, or even looking for loopholes in the system to evade paying taxes. As this is not only very prevalent in today's times, but also goes against the principles of Aparigraha.



## Niyamas:

**Sauca** is the first Niyama, as Yoga is the union of the Body and the soul, Patanjali of course could not neglect the importance of your physical/external body, and the significance of maintaining it. Sauca encourages purification of the body and the mind. The first niyama is sauca, meaning purity and cleanliness. It has both an inner and an outer aspect. Outer cleanliness simply means keeping ourselves clean. Inner cleanliness has as much to do with the healthy, free functioning of our bodily organs as with the clarity of our mind. Practicing asanas or pranayama are essential means for attending to this inner sauca. Asanas tone the entire body and helps remove toxins while pranayama cleanses our lungs, oxygenates our blood and purifies our nerves. “But more important than the physical cleansing of the body is the cleansing of the mind of its disturbing emotions like hatred, passion, anger, lust, greed, delusion and pride.” In a world where eating fast food, stressing over everything, over consumption of things like social media i.e. digital overload and mental clutter, the principle of Sauca underscores the importance of inner and outer purification for holistic well-being.

In the age where social media has (literally) taken over our lives, wherein we are consciously and/or subconsciously made to believe how the other person that we are viewing on various social media platforms or even the people around us for that matter, the culture that glorifies material success and constant hustling and striving, be it a 20-year old actor or influencer buying their first ever luxury car or house, or be it a 19-year old person who cleared his CA in the first attempt for instance, we consume so much of such content on a daily basis, and unknowingly, it takes a toll on our mental health, as it generates a feeling of us being incompetent, or unsuccessful, because we only know half side of the story, and without realising that everyone is made differently, and so is everyone’s journey and story, we mindlessly compare ourselves to any other person out there. Which is why the principle of **Santosha** emphasizes finding contentment and inner peace irrespective of external circumstances, which is a need of the hour.

The third of Patanjali’s Niyamas is ‘**Tapas**’, which often translates traditionally as ‘austerity’ or ‘discipline’. The word Tapas is derived from the root Sanskrit verb ‘tap’ which means ‘to burn’, and evokes a sense of ‘fiery discipline’ or ‘passion’. In this sense, Tapas can mean cultivating a sense of self-discipline, passion and courage in order to burn away ‘impurities’ physically, mentally and emotionally, and paving the way to our true greatness. Tapas doesn’t have to mean being solemn and serious though, this fieriness is what gets our heart pumping, heightens our desire for personal growth and reminds us of how much we love our yoga practice. Just as with all aspects of the Sutras though, Tapas has relevance both on and off the yoga mat. The discipline we learn while practicing Yoga is a fantastic lesson to take off the mat as well, and into our everyday lives. When we breathe through challenging situations like in a yoga practice, such as a difficult balancing pose, or when we find the strength to lift up into an arm balance we previously thought was ‘impossible’, we can take these lessons with us and learn to be strong when facing challenging life situations. Having the courage to NOT listen to the voices in our head that tell us we’re ‘not strong enough’ or ‘not good enough’ to attempt a

more demanding pose or go for that new job opportunity is also an element of Tapas that ‘burns’ away those ‘impure’ thoughts, and leads to more self trust and inner strength. Thus, by cultivating resilience in the face of adversity, individuals can harness their inner power and achieve meaningful transformation.

The second last of the Niyamas is **Swadhaya**, The fourth niyama is svadhyaya. Sva means "self" adhyaya means "inquiry" or "examination", and it not only means studying of the religious texts or scriptures, but any good literature that contributes to your well-being. It's probably fair to say that the more we realise what we are not, the closer we come to realising who or what we truly are. By studying ‘the self’ and recognizing our habits and thought processes, we realise how much of what we do and think is far from who we really know we are. When we listen to the ego, we often do things that don't always align with our true beliefs or intuition. The ‘I’ or small ‘self’ is mostly concerned with survival, which usually entails getting what it wants in all situations, and proving it is indeed ‘the best’ despite what consequences that might have for us. The small self judges, criticises, fears, conditions, doubts and is essentially the cause of the chitta vrittis, or ‘fluctuations of the mind’.

By paying attention to, or ‘studying’ our ‘self’, we become more aware of the things we do that harm us, and also those which serve us and bring us closer to that process of ‘yoking’ or ‘uniting’ with the true Self. If we apply the practice of svadhyaya to our modern-day lives and the situations we're in right now, ‘studying of the scriptures’ does not strictly have to mean sitting down with a huge copy of The Upanishads or chanting The Vedas; it might mean finding a book or a piece of writing that deepens your own yoga practice. Reading articles online about yoga, or a book which helps us move closer towards ‘Self-realisation’, is also a way of studying. By deepening our own knowledge, understanding and connection to yoga by continuing to read, research, be curious about yoga off the mat, we therefore cultivate our own practice of svadhyaya. It conveys the message that any activity that cultivates self-reflective consciousness can be considered svadhyaya.

As mentioned earlier, The term ‘**Ishvara Pranidhana**’ is made up of two words; Ishvara, which translates as ‘Supreme Being’, ‘God’, ‘Brahman’, ‘Ultimate Reality’ or ‘True Self’ and Pranidhana, which means ‘fixing’. In most translations of this Niyama, we're advised to ‘surrender’ to this Supreme Being or higher self, which in essence means cultivating a deep and trusting relationship with the universe, and making each action an offering to something bigger than us. And even though this is one of the most important pillar of the Niyamas, and Patanjali very staunchly agreed upon on the existence of God, and how he is the supreme being who guides us, protects us, and helps us go and grow through any and every situation of our life, ironically though, yoga in no way forces the idea of God or religion upon anyone; as there is an underlying idea that something bigger, more profound and pure exists other than ourselves, that is why, there are two ways of looking at this sutra when taken into daily life; it's often described as the ‘easiest’ path to peace and realisation, requiring no effort or pain on our part – we simply let go, devote everything to a higher power and completely devote our actions to whatever we consider that higher power to be.. But could this actually be the hardest path to follow? not really, because We are *so* inclined to control our every action and its outcome, and ‘letting go’ isn't always easy. If you're the sort of person who needs that sense of ‘control’ in life, and is in constant battle with the ‘monkey mind’\*, (which I'm guessing is a lot of us) then Ishvara Pranidhana is probably the most difficult of the Yamas and Niyamas to follow. As I have mentioned, it's not a God sitting up on a pedestal we're surrendering to;

it's the Ultimate Reality, and reality can be pretty scary sometimes ,but,in our daily life, Isvara Pranidhana can be seen as less of a devotional dedication or a surrendering, and more of an 'opening up to what *is* ', and instead of fighting against life's twists and turns, remaining open to experiencing life as it unfolds. Remaining fixed and rigid in our conditioned patterns, habits and limitations only leads to a limited life. Having said that, surrendering is hugely challenging, because it means transcending the ego, and the ego will do everything it can to hold on to some control. Without the conditioning, worries, perceptions and judgements that we falsely hold so closely to us, the ego would not exist, and therefore it tries desperately to cling on when we work on quietening it. Therefore, the concept of Ishwara-pranidhan leads to a sense of attachment and indebtedness towards the entire being –animate or inanimate. In this sense, the Niyama input of Ishwara-pranidhan contributes to inculcating an integral viewpoint.

(\*Monkey Mind is a Buddhist concept that describes a state of restlessness, capriciousness, and lack of control in one's thoughts, with your thoughts swinging wildly in different directions)

## Chapter 5:

### Conclusion:

In conclusion, our exploration into the relevance of the Yamas and Niyamas of yoga has illuminated their profound significance as guiding principles for holistic well-being and spiritual growth in the modern world. Throughout this project, we have delved into the timeless wisdom embedded within these ethical and moral guidelines, uncovering their practical applications and transformative potential in our lives.

Practice of yoga is beneficial for all the dimensions of health, i.e. physical, mental, social, and spiritual and at the same time promotes harmony with nature and helps in conserving environment. Thus, it is important that yama practices are brought forth by Yoga teachers so that a complete psycho spiritual base of yoga is understood and practiced. The practice of Yama may have an indirect effect on attitudes of compassion and non-violence, and not acquiring something that does not belong to you, etc are values that should be inculcated from a young age, for the betterment of not only the individual, but also the society at large. The *yamas* are broken down into five "wise characteristics." Rather than a list of dos and don'ts, "they tell us that our fundamental nature is compassionate, generous, honest and peaceful.

While we move beyond the physical dimension in this work, we also stay away from metaphysical discussions, confining ourselves to explore philosophical aspects and behaviors relevant to people in the thick of the action. Yamas are there commended behaviors that one should follow while dealing with others. Niyamas are recommended practices or routines related to oneself. These two dimensions steadily change the foundational aspects, and these gradual changes prepare a person for a more inclusive and integral worldview, while the ideas of *asteya* and *aparigraha* are the early precursors of modern ideas of coexistence and sustainability. *Ishwara Pranidhana* for instance, which had a very rigid and strict view of God, and spirituality attached to it (which to some extent is), however, we have also, in this research tried to analyse the different perspectives of what it could mean, and you need not necessarily surrender to God in particular, but instead, *Ishwara Pranidhan* has a much more fluid understanding which cannot be ignored, i.e. to surrender yourself to the higher being/ultimate reality, whether it's surrendering to a moment of difficulty or a moment of joy, surrendering the results of our actions, or simply learning to trust in the universe a little more; and each time we do choose to surrender, we move closer to freedom, along with that, it instills a feeling of gratitude and gratefulness in you, as it makes you realise, that YOU and ONLY YOU are not (and cannot) be the reason behind your achievements, but, there are so many reasons (and people) that you owe your success to, and make you feel indebted to each and every thing that has led you here.

Patanjali ensured that every aspect of our life was taken care of, with its range extending from our physical fitness, to honesty, not possessing something that does not belong to you, being content with what you have to even the study of religious texts for your betterment, it has

covered everything that not only a Yogi needs to know and follow to excel on his journey of Yogic excellence, but even a common man who wants to live a happy, content, healthy and ethical life.

Through this project, I aspire to inspire individuals to embrace the timeless wisdom of the Yamas and Niyamas, integrating these principles into their yoga practice as well as their daily lives to foster greater harmony, authenticity, and compassion within themselves and the world around them. As we embark on this journey of exploration and self-discovery, may we cultivate deep reverence for the ancient teachings of yoga and harness their transformative power to create a more conscious, sustainable, and compassionate world for ourselves and the coming generation.

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