**In Book Two of PYS we are introduced to the The Eight Limbs**

1. Yama Outer Observances
2. Niyama Inner Observances
3. Asana Posture
4. Pranayama Breath Techniques
5. Pratyahara Withdrawing the senses
6. Dharana Concentration

Samyama

1. Dhyana Meditation
2. Samadhi Absorption

The eight limbs are an excellent summary of the different aspects of a spiritual practice where it is possible to see how yama is concerned with our outer relationships and niyamas with our inner relationship to ourself. Asana primarily relates to our physicality and pranayama to our prana or energy body. Pratyahara is concerned with the senses and dharana/dhyana with the mind and our capacity of attention. Finally, samadhi is essentially concerned with consciousness itself.

Unlike Hatha Yoga which is an ecstatic path, creating electrical or pranic conductivity where the movement of prana, or more specifically kundalini, creates a feeling of ecstasy ultimately leading us to the bliss of absolute silence or stillness, that is Hatha Yoga has led to Raja Yoga - **this is an** **enstatic path** where we work with the mind more directly and create the circumstance where we can allow the silence of contentless consciousness, the Purusha, to emerge and be directly experienced as who or what we are. This may be a gentle easeful release into the deeper state of Pure contentless Consciousness or it also possible that as we fall into deeper states of Consciousness we will experience kundalini movement carrying us to Purusha.

It is interesting to note that the word ‘Anga’ or limb is used rather than a word like ‘Bhuma’ meaning stage, so we see that these eight limbs are not sequential, i.e. we do not achieve one and then move onto the next….rather they are all related to the other, each limb strengthening and balancing each other like the branches of a tree.

Different yoga schools or styles of yoga emphasize different limbs but generally speaking we can say that an integrated approach is needed.

It is sometimes suggested that traditionally prospective students would need to show that they had right behaviour and the yamas and niyamas would be a summary of this; alternatively they can be seen as the behaviour of an awakened being showing us what is possible and what we can gradually cultivate through our practice and by raising our awareness of how things are for us in everyday life. More later…

T**aking a closer look at the Yamas & Niyamas….**

2.30. The principles of respect for others include nonviolence, truth, honesty, moderation, and noncovetousness

2.31. When unaffected by social or geographic considerations, or considerations of time or circumstances, these principles are universal. They are the supreme ideals.

2.32. The five personal principles of postive action are purity, contentment, a disciplined life, study of the sacred texts, and worship of God […..]

2.35. Around one who is solidly established in nonviolence, hostility disappears.

2.36. For one established in truth, the result fits the action.

2.37. All the jewels appear for one who is firmly set in honesty.

2.38. Vitality appears in one who is firmly set in moderation.

2.39. One who perseveres on the path of noncovetousness gains deep understanding of the meaning of life.

2.40. Purity protects one’s body and brings non-physical relationships with others.

2.41. Then purity, clarity, and wellbeing of the spirit come to flower, as well as concentration, mastery of the eleven sense organs, and perception of the inner being.

2.42. Contentment brings supreme happiness.

2.43. By eliminating impurity, a disciplined life brings perfection and mastery to the body and the eleven sense organs.

2.44. Union with the chosen divinity comes from the study of self through the sacred texts.

2.45. Contemplation and its powers are attained through worship of God.

Trans: Bouanchaud, Bernard (1997)

They are qualities of an evolved individual that we can be mindful of both on and off our mat which can inspire us and help us see ways in which we have grown, and it can be very interesting to see how there is a kind of essential paradox apparent where when we let go of the necessity for something it arises for us anyway, or when we give something freely it is returned to us.

In the Sutras the Yamas and Niyamas are given great prominence and in 2.31 we are told by Bouanchaud, as above, that that they are ideal principles which “favour the inner evolution of the individual” (p113) but which may require modification in accordance with prevailing circumstances so that for instance war may alter our relationship with ahimsa. That said most other translations regard the Yamas and Niyamas as universal laws which are always applicable whosoever and wherever we are, so for instance Shearer (1982) states “These laws are universal. Unaffected by time, place, birth, or circumstance, together they constitute the ‘Great Law of Life’.” (p108) You will need to contemplate this although the latter seems most likely, especially in relation to those who have fully committed to the yogic path.

In summary they are:

**Yamas Outer Observances**

Ahimsa Non-harming/Respectful/Compassionate

Satya Truthfulness/Honesty

Asteya Non-stealing/Generosity

Brahmacharya Chastity/Moderation

Aparighara Non-grasping/Noncovertousness

**Niyamas Inner Observances**

Saucha Purity/Simplicity

Samtosha Contentment/Centeredness

Tapas Self-discipline/Enthusiasm

Svadhyaya Spiritual Study/Self-reflection

Isvara Pranidhanam Devotion/Celebration/Desire for Highest Ideal

Indeed we can say that the Yamas and Niyamas are telling us the **fundamental qualities of our true nature** which are only obscured by our inability to perceive the silent, still presence of the self within. Instead we habitually identify with and engage with transitory thoughts, feelings, memories, sensations, etc. The Yamas and Niyamas are the qualities that are present when we are connected to our true self or Purusha and these will be the qualities we possess towards the outer and inner world, something that grows when we gradually develop sattva and repeatedly experience the state of the contentless, consciousness at our core.

We can consciously try to act in accordance with the yamas and niyamas and it is good to see how Patanjali notes that when we live in accordance with them then we shall see changes in the world around and in our good fortune, for instance when we are established in non-harming then all hostilties will cease in our prescence or if do not steal then all wealth comes to us. This is very useful because as we start to cultivate the yamas and niyamas we can start to see this proof directly in everyday life!

Indeed the value of the yamas and niyamas will be shown to us through our participation in life if we actively inquire into our viewpoint, noticing whether we are acting from a place of separateness or connectedness, or self-interest versus service/care for others.

We can spend time reflecting upon each yama and niyama, observing how it applies to our daily living. We can bring them to our yoga practice, noticing if they inform our own practice; knowing that **the remaining limbs will inevitably help us to increasingly live in accordance with the yamas and niyamas as the presence of the witness grows stronger within us.**

However please note that when we are aware of these ten observances we must be careful that we do not begin to punish ourself for percieved failures in our thoughts, feelings and actions, as they are not useful in this way and can even be damaging. Rather it is better to be a curious explorer where are at first simply raising an honest awareness of when we are acting selfishly or unkindly, simply accepting that it is so.

Please remember that Ahimsa is a fundamental quality that must underpin all others so that as you consciously spend time with the different yamas and niyamas you will always be kind and compassionate towards youself! When you look inside always bring yourself flowers!

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