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### June 2004 Focus of the Month

YOGA SUTRA II:29

Eight limbs to Yoga are described. (Tools to help you access Yoga.)

Let's Demystify what Yoga means:

Eight limbs of Yoga are designed to give us tools to use to reach the Yogic state. What is the Yogic state? Yoga is defined as Union. Union with what? Union of a higher understanding. **If we are connected to something larger than ourselves, we have a better capability to "see the big picture"**. We are not so wrapped up in the little details of our life that pull us from our center of serenity. Yoga is the ability to love everything and everyone despite our differences.

The eight limbs:

1. Yama - non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, non-hoarding
2. Niyama – purity, contentment, self-discipline, self study, Surrender to God  
**I like to describe these simply as the 10 commandments of Yoga**

3. Asana – physical and mental postures
4. Pranayama – Breathing practices

**These two limbs help us take care of ourselves. Physically with postures and exercises, mentally with breathing exercises to calm our nervous system and remove dis-stress from our bodies.**

5. Pratyahara – Withdrawing the senses

**This step begins the process of turning our attention away from what other people are doing, away from all the little details that pull us from our center.**

6. Dharana – Concentration
7. Dhyana – Meditation
8. Samadhi – Blissful state

**These final three steps turn our attention inward to ourselves. We can best use our energy to change ourselves. We can not change other people and if we try our own lives become a mess. I refer to these last three limbs as "Mind your own business".**

**To make it easy to apply to our lives I have broken this down to three basic principals:**

1. **General friendliness and caring in all our affairs (as we learned from Yoga Sutra I:33 when a Yogi thus cultivates friendliness, the thinking substance becomes serene).**
2. **Take care of yourself**
3. **Mind your own business**

Below is more detail on the eight limbs from the Sutras. I used the version of the sutras titled "The Textbook of Yoga Psychology" by Ramamurti S. Mishra M.D.

The first four limbs are our external work.

### **Yamas and NiYamas "Our Ten Commandments"**

YS II:30 - 45

Yamas = InterPersonal Relationships Yamas create peace and happiness with those around us  
"Be the change you want to see in the world." Ghandi

Thoughts lead to Words, lead to Action.

1. Ahimsa – Non violence. Not just in not killing, but in words (sarcasm means tearing flesh, we can tear flesh with our words) and feelings. Thoughts, words, Action
2. Satya – Truthfulness in Kindness. Just tell the truth. Simple, right? Do not use truth to hurt or destroy. If you want truthfulness, give truthfulness. Pattabhi Jois defines satya: "Satya is truth without hurting. Very difficult."
3. Asteya – Not stealing or coveting; stop wanting; thoughts lead to action . . .



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4. brahmacharya – actually means to keep god as your teacher . . . but in most translations brahmacharya is sadly mis-represented as celibacy. Sexual energy is highly potential energy. Use your sexual energy wisely. And controlling your thoughts will control your desires. Thoughts, words, actions.
5. Aparigraha – not hoarding. Create space in thoughts, words, action. Space in thoughts keeps us open minded, space in words makes us better listener, space in action keeps us not attached to material things. We want to be comfortable in life, but not excessive.

Niyamas = Lifestyle

**Yamas create peace and happiness with those around us, Niyama gives us a lifestyle.**

1. Saucha (purity) - Purity in our thoughts, words, actions. The Yogis believe purity within ourselves protects us from other's impurities.
2. Santosha (contentment) – From contentment comes happiness.

Final three Niyamas= Kriya Yoga kr=action, kriya=action for purification

3. Tapas – Self Discipline and Purifactory acts. Being disciplined to do your practice to burn off impurities (asana, pranayama, once-yearly fasting, etc.) The Mahabharata defines tapas as “penance”.
4. Svadhyaya – Self Study and Mantra. This is not a psychoanalysis of yourself!! This is a study of putting more love in our heart and what might keep us from feeling the love — or giving the love.
5. Ishvara Pranidhana – Surrender to God . . . Learn to go with the flow of the Universe. Many things happen outside of our control, all we can do is go with it. To fight it or paddle upstream usually gets us nowhere or just exhausts us. Methods to do this:
  - ☞ Pray for wisdom
  - ☞ Meditate by focusing your mind on goodness and on paths of virtue
  - ☞ Realize Destructive (or instinctual) driving forces and replace them with Constructive driving forces (more on this later). *When having Destructive driving forces remember one can not inflict injury on others without first hurting oneself by those ideas.*
    - Three tools to overcoming Destructive Driving Forces
    - 1. Defense – Cultivate the exact opposite idea. Want revenge on someone, think of doing something for them instead.
    - 2. Substitute – Consciously put your mind on something else — work or a child or a project (something positive).
    - 3. Sublimation – Think of something higher — put your mind on something Good. Mediate on the Sun or Trees or your Divinity, recite a mantra, “Let Go, Let God”, etc.  
(Definition of sublimation: to divert the expression of an instinctual desire or impulse from its primitive form to one that is considered more socially or culturally acceptable. Definition of Sublime: of outstanding spiritual, intellectual, or moral worth.)

A tremendous amount of psychic energy is mis-utilized by destructive driving forces. Yamas and NiYamas help us to utilize this energy for development of body and mind.

## Asana

YOGA SUTRA II:46-48

The third step of Yoga, which is postures — physical and mental exercises:

The big picture of Asana Practice is more than Physical. There are three verses in the sutras relating to Asana practice.

- 1) YS II:46 Postures should be steady and comfortable. (See Focus of the Month April 2004.) Meaning a little work but still enjoyable. Don't push, just move and breathe. Which leads us to the next sutra.
- 2) YS II:47 By Relaxation Of Effort And Meditation On The Infinite Asanas Are Perfected. During asana tension is released producing natural relaxation and a favorable mental environment for internal work. There are two types of tension:
  - a) Physical: If untreated makes our body tight and does not allow for our organs to operate efficiently. This leads to diseases of the body.
  - b) Mental: Stress is mental tension and results in psychological disorders or diseases of the mind.

Asana releases these elements and the body attains natural relaxation.

- 3) YS II:48 “From That Arises Immunity From Opposite Conditions” a.k.a. dualities. I like to think of dualities as conflicts. Thus Asana produces physical, mental, and Spiritual development by releasing tension physically,



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which calms the nervous system and thus the mind, and sets the stage for the internal work necessary for Spiritual development.

### **Pranayama**

YOGA SUTRA II:49-53

The fourth step of Yoga, pranayama is described

Pranayama is included in breathing techniques, but it is also about energy movement in both individuals and the universe. We will start with pranayama movement in individuals through breathing exercises.

YS II:49-53

When asana is perfected, inspiration and expiration can be controlled.

One of the most important systems of the body is the motion of the heart and lungs, all motions depend on their existence, thus the motion of the heart and lungs constitutes the phenomenon of individual life.

Though the motion of the heart is involuntary, the motion of the lungs can be controlled to some extent. By practicing breathing exercises one can affect the motion of the heart (ex. using our breath to slow our heart rate). By means of the motion of the heart one can effect every cell in the body through its efficient delivery of oxygen.

We are then able to be in tune with our own bodies, this aids us in tuning in with nature's rhythms and cycles, which in turn makes it easier for us to connect to Love or Something Greater.

Breathing exercises or Pranayama is where you sit in a meditative state and consciously work with your breath. You can work with lengthening or deepening the inhale and/or exhale, or retain the breath — either after inhalation or exhalation or both.

Breaths can be long or short and modified according to space, time, and number.

- ❏ Beginners are limited to the space of the chest, as the practice advances they begin to occupy more and more space to the point of cellular breathing — or utilizing oxygen in the blood stream.
- ❏ By daily and regular practice one reaches mastery of breathing exercises. It is recommended for beginners to start with a simple equal ratio 2:2:2 ratio (inhale:retain:exhale) or 4:4:4.

Control of breath leads to mastery of mind and senses.

“Just as impurities of metals are destroyed by heating them in fire, disorders and diseases of the body and mind and senses are destroyed in the fire of pranayama and purity is achieved.

The main obstacles to obtaining purity (Self-light) are these:

- ❏ *Avidya* = ignorance, which covers reality
- ❏ Weakness of mind regarding concentration

As a result of mastery gained in pranayama, ignorance which is covering the light of Self is destroyed.

When the mind becomes fit for concentration it displaces a tremendous amount of psychic energy which was previously mis-utilized by the senses, that can now be used for pratyahara (next limb and next months topic) and directing our energy inward and upward ;)

To be continued next month.