

NONVIOLENCE, NON-STEALING, TRUTHFULNESS

Week #2 of a 2-Week Series, "Practicing the Ethics of Yoga"

With Rev. Richard Maraj

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Shout out to Jackie and the entire congregation at Unity of Rockford, Illinois, who have been using our service as a part of theirs for, I think, more than a decade now. And so, can we just hear it from you? Can you clap? They've been a part of us for a while. Woo! All right. Thanks, guys. Thank you. All right.

So, how many people do yoga and are fans of yoga? Anybody? Yoga peeps. How many people don't do yoga, but you like to wear yoga pants? *[Congregants laugh]* Anybody? Okay. Surveys actually show that 80% of women who wear yoga pants never actually do yoga. It's a little information I thought I'd share with you.

Paramahansa Yogananda defines yoga as the ultimate union of the human individual soul with universal divine consciousness. Yoga is a 5,000-year practice that is designed to merge the human consciousness with the Infinite. And there are four aspects to yoga. Number one is the postures: the poses. The second is breath work: to keep us calm and to control our energy. The third is meditation: to quiet the mind and bring us to a sense of awareness of the present moment. And then the fourth one -- which is what we're going to look at -- is the ethics and philosophy and the principles for living.

The benefits of yoga, I think we know, are widespread. And they are inner peace, divine realization, clarity, and efficiency. Yoga really improves our concentration, opens up our level of intuition and insight, as well as overall harmony -- bringing overall harmony in our daily life.

Today we begin a short but powerful series on the book, "The Yamas & Niyamas: Exploring Yoga's Ethical Practice" by Deborah Adele. And these yamas and niyamas are the 10 ethical guidelines and the spiritual compass for us leading our best and most spiritually centered life. The main difference between them is that the yamas look more outside of ourselves, and the niyamas look more within. One is more of the "do's," and one is more of the "don'ts."

So, today we're going to start with the five "don'ts" -- with the yamas. And they are nonviolence, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-excess, and non-possessiveness.

So, Principle #1 is **NON-VIOLENCE**. And this is about not engaging in violence; not doing harm, not hurting others. And it includes all forms: killing, torturing, damaging, abusing, injuring. But there are other aspects of violence that we don't think of -- that we hurt ourselves and others. And they include anger and hatred; and judgment and condemning and shaming; bullying, insulting.

You know, we do a lot more harm with our words and thoughts and actions -- and even our inactions -- than we may realize. We diminish ourselves and we diminish others in the way that we speak and treat about them. And it actually has an impact on our peace of mind and the health of our bodies; the closeness and trust and intimacy in our relationships, and our own ability to be successful and prosperous.

In Eastern thought, nonviolence is so valuable that it is at the very core and foundation of all yoga philosophy and practice. Gandhi described nonviolence as the greatest and most active force available to humankind. And why would he say that? It's because nonviolence is centered in Divine Love. And it is grounded in a recognition of the deep respect and the interconnectedness of all of life.

So that, when we harm others, we are harming ourselves. We are harming our world. That interconnectedness of life is calling for us to not do harm; calling us to not express violence. You know, violence in all of its very forms -- what it does is it pulls us away from our nature, and our nature is love. When we speak and think and act in ways that are harmful, we are out of alignment with our nature. We are out of alignment with love.

Adele says that, when we do harm that we're choosing fear, and when we're nonviolent, we choose love. And when we choose non-violence, we choose to feel peace; to feel centered and more grounded; and to be willing to interact with others with kindness, with gentleness and acceptance and compassion and understanding.

And so, she says our work is to move from fear to love. And she says we need to examine and look at ourselves with some basic questions like: How do you treat yourself when you make a mistake or really mess up? Do you beat yourself up and are you kind of harsh and tough on yourself? Or do you deal with yourself and treat yourself with kindness and compassion and encouragement? When someone is unkind to you or they're cold to you, what story do you make up about them?

And she says, **in all situations, when we get triggered, we should ask the question: What would love do?**

So, I want you to think of a situation in your life that isn't going as well -- probably with somebody else involved in it -- and ask yourself: What would love do in that situation in your life right now?

You know, the foundation of yoga is love. That the way to not do harm, the way to not be violent with ourselves and others in word, thought, and deed -- and it is to choose love. That is the foundational principle.

The next one is **TRUTHFULNESS**. Sometimes it's hard to be honest, like, all the time. Anybody ever ask you, *"Hey, what do these new shorts look like on me?"* [Congregants laugh] What do you say? And what if you're not feeling great on that day and someone asks you and you say, *"Oh, I'm great. Never felt better in my life!"* Or have you ever had somebody ask you to do something you really didn't want to do it, but you ended up going along and saying, *"Of course! I'll help you move on Saturday morning!"*

Carl Jung said this. He said, *"A lie would make no sense unless the truth was seen to be dangerous."* And what he's saying is that sometimes the reason we lie is because we think that other person won't like us. That's the danger. They may not like us. They may get mad at us. They may disagree with us. And we think that there's danger in telling the truth; that there's danger that we might get rejected and that we might get hurt. And we would rather put on a pretend us and be liked than the real us.

Here is what yoga says: **Truthfulness isn't safe, but it is good.** Because if we're willing to speak our truth and be our authentic self, all that energy of suppressing how we feel, suppressing what we really want is released. And we feel a sense of peace and we interact with people in a more authentic, connected way.

And so where in your life are you not being honest with yourself? Where in your life are you pretending to be who you're not or to be pretending that everything's okay? And where in your life are you not being true to yourself? Or how about this one: Where in your life are you not being truthful to someone that is important that you know you should be sharing that information with?

A couple things about being honest and truthfulness. Number one is that it doesn't mean you tell everybody all your business. That there are boundaries; there are whatever level of privacy. Everybody's got their own, but it doesn't automatically mean ... being honest and truthful doesn't mean spill your guts to everybody of everything going on in your life.

And the second one, it does not mean that you get to cut loose and tell somebody how you really think. [Congregants laugh] Yes, being honest -- but being honest with compassion; being honest with kindness and care.

And this honesty thing, I'll tell you, it kind of scares us. You ever said or had somebody say something like, *"I would rather die than share that with my partner, my parents, my kids,"* whoever? It scares us. Again, if the consequence is seen as dangerous, that we are more likely to want to lie. But sharing our truth with kindness and compassion, and not burying or suppressing our authentic self, actually frees up all kinds of energy to create and enjoy life more abundantly.

The third principle for living from yoga is **NON-STEALING**. I mean, this one seems pretty obvious. You know, I didn't rob any banks and steal anything. I didn't forget to give my neighbor's lawnmower back or all these things that we sometimes, you know ... or take advantage of someone or allow someone to be taken advantage of.

But in so many ways, we steal from others and we steal from ourselves, amazingly. And it's really coming from a source of lack and a source of scarcity, and thinking that not only is there not enough, but we aren't enough. And strangely, we can steal from other people in a lot of different ways -- ideas, attention, all kinds of different ways that we steal. But we often steal from ourselves.

And here's a surprising one. When we worry, we are stealing the moment and we're stealing some of our future. If we're constantly worried about things not going well, and us not having whatever it takes. Another one is comparing ourselves to others. That one steals and robs us of our joy and our peace and our self-confidence. You know, and another thing is spending time wishing life was different than it is. Fighting against the way life is robs us, again, of the present moment. That's the thing that suffers the most when we cheat and rob ourselves.

And the thing about it is: that's from a mindset of lack. But the truth is, as Jesus said, "*The kingdom of God is within you.*" There is no lack. We don't need you to be stealing anything from ourselves in any way, because the fullness and the Allness of God is within us. And all that God is, we are. We are children of God created in the image and likeness of God. There's an abundance of good that's available to all of us within ourselves.

So, to think, "*I'm not enough*" and to think, "*I don't have what it takes*" is just not true. And all that means is we have forgotten who we really are. Because when we remember the truth of who we are -- which is powerful, dynamic spiritual beings -- that we don't need to steal anything from anybody. That we are more likely to want to be giving and sharing of our abundant good.

"I am a child of God."

Together: [with congregants] *"I am a child of God."*

"I am a powerful spiritual being."

[With congregants] *"I am a powerful spiritual being."*

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Together: [with congregants] *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

I am ready, willing and able.

Together: [with congregants] *"I am ready, willing and able."*

I messed that up. *"I am ready, willing, and worthy."*

[With congregants]: *"I am ready, willing, and worthy."*

We don't need to steal when we are coming from a place of fullness; of knowing that we're powerful, amazing spiritual beings, and the kingdom of God is within us. And that all God is, we are. That is within us already!

"I am a rich child of God's abundant universe."

Together: [with congregants] *"I am a rich child of God's abundant universe."* Take a deep breath. All right.

And the next one is **NON-EXCESS**. How many people here have ever overeaten? Ever overeaten so much that you felt stuffed and you had to loosen your belt or unbutton your pants? Anybody ever went there? Apparently not very many. [Congregants laugh] How many people have been stuffed like that before?

And you know you will be stuffed like that again. Even though it hurts on us, we are going for it! It is incredible, our culture! Like, there used to be just small, medium, and large. But now, Starbucks has got short, tall, grande, venti, and trenta. I've never even heard of these things. But apparently, the short is actually more than what used to be small. I mean, it is absolutely incredible.

You ever been to Costco and buy a bunch of stuff you didn't need? And you spent way more money than you planned? You know, the thing about it is: even though we eat and keep eating a lot, and we know it's not good for us, it's because something in us ... we live in a culture that compulsively believes that more is better; that bigger is better. You know, we like excess. We like hoarding. We like being pack rats. You know, we like saving that outfit even though it's two sizes smaller because we know one day that we will get back in it. I heard someone say, *"If some is good, more is better, and too much is just right."*
[Congregants laugh]

And so, besides more is better, one of the things we do is we struggle, because we have a hard time letting go. We associate excess and holding on and getting more with being safe, with being secure, with being prosperous.

You know, excess blocks and clogs our lives, not only physically, but mentally and spiritually. All the stuff that we have -- that we have to keep managing and taking care of. And there's nothing wrong with having a lot more stuff, but when it starts impacting our lives -- blocking and clogging our ability to try new things, You know, sometimes letting go of stuff, it just makes us lighter. It makes us feel brighter.

And we love the word "more." We love more. But sometimes less is better. And when we hear the word less, we think ABOUT failure. Less -- *"Oh, they're poor; it's broke; they're sad. There's nothing prosperous about less. There's nothing desirable about less."*

But actually there is. Because as we lighten ourselves, there's a sense of ease. A sense of peace. A sense of being more aware of what we have and what's going on.

You ever do this one? I like mustard. But I'm at the grocery store and I thought, *"Oh man, I don't think I have any mustard."* So, I bought two and then I thought, *"Oh, what the heck, let me buy three."* I come home and there are three things of mustard in the cupboard!

And what I'm saying here is: sometimes we have so much stuff, we don't know what we have. And we're not able to use it. And sometimes it goes bad before we get to use it. And so excess is not for the best.

So, let me ask you: Where in your life do you think there's some excess? And I'm not just saying you're home and with mustard, but where in activities? You know, in relationships? I mean, what are the areas in your life where there is excess?

And so, two things for practice this week. Oh, and the thing is, we have excess in all areas. Like, not only too much food, eating, but iPhone. Anybody? I spend way too much time on that iPhone! You know, sometimes it's watching television. Sometimes it is alcohol. Whatever it is, there's excess in our lives.

And so, the first practice is to cut back on something that you have excess in. It could be an activity or it could be whatever it is. And don't fill it with something else; just release it and let it go. And experience less.

And the other one is to clean a closet; clean a drawer. We cram up our houses a lot, and physical stuff really can be excessive. And it crams and blocks our good, mentally and spiritually. So, we can free ourselves in that way. Living freer, living easier is a powerful thing. That's better. That's prosperous. That will help us unify our consciousness with the Infinite.

Okay, how about this one? **NON-POSSESSIVENESS.** Let's get back to the clothes. Mom used to make us, every six months or once a year, clean out our stuff, and we'll go through all of our clothes. And we were doing it once, and it was in Canada. And there's this flannel shirt that I loved, but it had a hole in it. And so, my mom did that and tossed it on the pile. I said, *"Mom, no! That's my favorite shirt!"*

She said, *"There's a hole in there."*

I said, *"I know, but it's so comfortable. It's my favorite!"*

And here I am fighting to be possessive of a shirt with a hole in it!

And so, what this one is about is the things in our lives that we cling to that we think we need and have to have to be happy. Because we have things like that. We think, *"I have to have that."* I mean, I'm not talking about a house or car or anything. There are other things in our lives that we have that we cling to. You know, whether it's a relationship, whether it's a job, whether it's a whatever it is ... there are things that we are clinging to thinking that's the source of our happiness. That's the source. of our good.

Remember the story of the rich young man and Jesus? And he's saying, *"I'd like to have eternal life and enter the kingdom of heaven."*

Jesus said, "Well, you just go sell all your stuff and you'll be cool." And he walked away sad, because he didn't want to let go of his stuff.

Nothing is wrong with stuff. Nothing is wrong with money or possessions at all. The question is: Do our possessions possess us? Are the things in our lives driving our lives? And giving more purpose than our spiritual life or being in service to God and to humanity?

You know, if you had your hand and you grabbed some sand, and you made a fist to hold as much sand as you can, a lot of that sand would just leak out. But if you opened your hand and got a scoop of sand, you would have way more sand with an open hand ... and there'd be less stress in holding a fist.

And sometimes we live our lives tight-fisted, holding on; don't want to lose it. But instead of holding life tightly, if we did it lightly and opened our hands, there's a lot more good and abundance and ease and joy that is available for us if we just let go.

Somebody wrote, *"Those who fight to get it have to fight to keep it,"* and gave this example. A company launched a hostile takeover to reach the top, and they constantly had to fight to avoid losing their market share. People who chase a partnership through dynamic conflict often find their relationship needs ongoing arguments to maintain it.

And so, one of the things this is talking about – possessiveness -- is don't be as attached to those things, and begin to let go and live your life with greater ease. Live your life trusting the Universe is supporting you and supporting a happy life. And you don't have to be white-knuckled all the time.

"I live my life with ease and grace."

Together: [with congregants] *"I live my life with ease and grace."* Take a deep breath.

"I trust the Universe loves me and wants the best for me."

Together: [with congregants] *"I trust the universe loves me and wants the best for me."* Deep breath.

"As I relax, good things always happen to me and through me."

Together: [with congregants] *"As I relax, good things always happen to me and through me."*

Hold life and our goals lightly, not tightly. Open a space for greater peace and greater ease. Relax and enjoy this amazing life that we've been given.

Why does everyone love their yoga teacher? Because they bend over backwards for us. [Congregants laugh and moan]

What do you call a bagel that has mastered yoga? A pretzel. [Congregants laugh and moan]

Okay, big finish. What did the yogi tell his dog? *"Nama, stay."* [Congregants laugh, moan and applaud]
Oh, mercy applause! Thank you very much. Here we go.

Yoga is a powerful, powerful, powerful practice – a 5,000-year-old science about unifying our consciousness with the Infinite; knowing our oneness with God. And there are principles and practices in this process for us to achieve that same goal.

So, I hope you'll practice these things, or look them up or watch the talk again. And then let's do this thing together. Because it is a powerful and noble thing.

This week, practice nonviolence, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-excess, and non-possessiveness. These are the things will lift our lives up and take us along the path to live with the ethics of yoga.

God bless you all.

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