

THE NIYAMAS

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

With Rev. Richard Maraj

Sunday, Oct. 4, 2026

So, today we're talking about yoga: finishing up our two-week series, "Practicing the Ethics of Yoga." How many people do yoga or fans of yoga? Yoga peeps? All right!

You know, people say that yoga will change your life, but I think that's a bit of a stretch. *[Congregants laugh]* You know, I didn't believe that yoga could fix my posture, but I stand corrected. *[Congregants laugh]*

So, yoga is over 5,000 years old. And it was formalized in the "Yoga Sutras of Patanjali" in 400. And I think we all know that there are four elements to yoga: the physical moves (the postures); the breath work; meditation; And what we're looking at are the ethics and philosophy -- the principles for living the path of unifying our mind with the mind of the Divine; the merging of our human consciousness with the Infinite.

You know, Deborah Adele, who wrote the book "The Yamas and Niyamas," writes about the ten guidelines that serve as our spiritual compass for daily living. Last week we looked at the first five -- the practices, Yamas -- which were nonviolence, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-excess, and non-possessiveness. And those are related to the external practices and behaviors.

And today, in the Niyamas, we're going to look at the internal practices and self-discipline. Now, I purposely did not use the Hindu words in any of this, because I just want to spare myself the embarrassment and the trouble of misunderstanding of using those words. But those 10 guidelines are absolutely powerful and amazing.

So again, we're going to look at the second five practices, and they are: purity, contentment, self-discipline, self-study and surrender. And the focus on these, again, are their inward practices to help us develop a spiritually mature and conscious relationship with ourselves: with our own minds, our own emotions, our own choices, and our own spiritual life.

The quick summary of them are: with purity, it's about cleansing our consciousness. With contentment, it is about acceptance and making peace with the present. Number three, self-discipline, is about disciplining the mind to hang in there to do the right things we need to do to transform our lives. Self-study is about getting to know the Divine within ourselves. And surrender is about surrendering the human ego to the greater wisdom of Spirit. So, let's look a little bit deeper at all of these.

The first one we'll look at is **PURITY**. You know, purity is about releasing and clearing out what no longer serves us. Purity is a process of cleansing physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

Adele encourages us to notice in our own lives what are the things that we're carrying that we don't need to be carrying. What are the things that we're holding on to that are weighing us down that are not supporting the kind of life that we want to live?

Sometimes we carry things like old beliefs, resentments, emotional baggage, unhealthy habits and clutter of all kind. Negative thought patterns, relationships, or even commitments that no longer fit.

You know, in our culture, we tend to hold on to things. We tend to hold on. We tend to want to add. We tend to want to acquire. And we tend to want to get more. And we hold on even when things aren't good for us, like holding on to grudges and holding on to old stuff that we don't even use anymore that we just stack into our garages and closets. There are all kinds of things that we hold on to.

And it's interesting that we're addicted to holding on -- we like holding on -- but we don't like letting go. We like to add, but we don't like to subtract. We like to acquire, but we don't like to release. We like to get more and need more, but we don't like having less and we don't like simplifying or minimizing.

And so, it really behooves us all to learn how to release, because it lightens and brightens. It opens up a space, a level of clarity and ease, and gets us in the flow.

So, if we're struggling in any area, I always think the first question to ask ourselves is: What am I holding on to that isn't good that it's time for me to release? You know, purity is an ongoing process of subtraction, release and letting go. Rather than adding and keeping holding on to.

Purifying is about also lightening our load. How many people have a packed schedule that you always seem to have so much stuff to do? You know, I am the king of overbooking, overcommitting, and just overscheduling stuff. And then you feel stressed and you feel anxious about having to pull back. And it's really not the best way to be living.

Telling ourselves, "I don't have to be that busy" is an important thing, but it's something that we don't even pay attention to ourselves, because our mindset is so set in doing more and being busy. But the fact is: if we did a little less and lightened up our schedule a little bit more, we'd be more present; we'd be more engaged; and we would be enjoying our lives with a greater level of ease and freedom.

Adele also says that we need to be conscious in terms of purity ... not just releasing and letting go, but not even inviting in negativity. My mom used to say to me all the time, *"Guard your mental house."* It's one thing to say, *"Hey, I'm going to keep my mind positive,"* but it's another thing to make sure you're avoiding and not getting yourself stuck or taking on the negativity.

You know, my mom used to say that all the time, and last night I thought, *"Well, I wonder where she got that quote: 'Guard your mental house.'"* So, I Googled *"Who said, 'Guard your mental house?'"* And here's what the answer said on Google; this is Google's exact response: *"The phrase, 'Guard your mental house' is frequently used by Richard Maraj, senior minister at Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center ..."* [Congregants laugh] *"... who often attributes the saying to his mother's advice of being mindful about negative thoughts."* I mean, so anyway. All right.

So, purity. It is an ongoing process, because we, as human beings, A -- have the tendency to hold on and have a difficult time letting go. But it is something we need to do on an everyday basis. Almost in the same way that we have a shower every day to cleanse and release, we need to have a process of purifying and releasing within.

The second one is **CONTENTMENT**. Okay, so on a scale of 1 to 10 -- 10 being the highest -- how content are you with yourself? And with the work that you do and the life that you're living? How many people know you could be happy and joyful and totally at peace with your life, even if it stayed exactly the way it is and didn't change? So, you'd be the same person: same lifestyle, same income, same problems. Could you find happiness in exactly and making peace with your life exactly the way it is right now?

You know, we have this tendency in our culture to say things like, *"I'll be happy when I make more money."* *"I'll be happy when I find the right relationship."* *"I'll be happy when we start the family."* *"I'll be happy when we go through this bumpy stuff and things just settle down."* *"I'll be happy when I get in better shape and lose 10 pounds."* We are in a culture that is so goal-oriented -- so driven and competitive -- that we are constantly deferring happiness until we achieve that thing; until we reach that goal. We are postponing our joy and our satisfaction to later, when the conditions are right.

And so, we are always in a state of preparing; a state of getting ready. Or as a Southern friend of mine says, *"a state of fixin' to do something."* You know, *"some day," "on day."* That we keep putting it off; our happiness gets delayed.

And when we are saying that we'll be happy *"when ..."*, you know what that's really saying? That today's not good enough to be happy. That happy's *"out there."* And it's an unfortunate thing that limits our joy. It limits our happiness. Somebody said, *"This moment is not merely preparing for life; it is life. And we get to choose how we live and experience our life."*

You know, we tend to split everything in our lives in two categories: things we like or things we don't like. Things we want or things we don't want. And there's nothing wrong with having preferences. However, when we get to a place of thinking that peace and happiness can only come *"when I get all my preferences together"* ... that's when it really limits us. You know, we can actually choose to be happy right now.

There's a magnet on my fridge that says, *"Life doesn't have to be perfect to be wonderful."* Nobody's life's ever going to be perfect. And the question is: Are we going to choose to be content? Are we going to choose to be at peace with the life that we have right now and the person we are right now? And there's nothing wrong with wanting to advance and improve. But can you really feel that peace right here and now?

Eleanor Roosevelt said that famous line, *"Most people are as happy as they have made up their mind to be."* And so, how happy have you made up your mind to be?

Contentment is a state of peaceful satisfaction with who we are, with what we have, and our current life situation. This is a powerful yogic practice: to be content with right where you are and who you are. And that's a good launching pad to attract and build even greater things. It isn't giving up. It is one of the smartest things to be present to how joyful life is.

The third practice is **SELF-DISCIPLINE**. How many people know that if you were a little bit more disciplined in different areas of your life, that you would be further ahead and have done and achieved more with more discipline? Anybody find that?

I think that self-discipline is absolutely a requirement for personal transformation and success in any area of our lives. The ability to hang in there and keep working until it breaks through or changes and transforms is a vital aspect of our lives.

You know, studies are showing that success in life is built on small, consistent actions ... not hitting the Grand Slam home run and getting that big break all at once. Small, repeated actions; consistent daily choices and positive habits gets us further.

Self-discipline. You know, daily practice could be meditation and exercise. It could be reading. It could be writing. It could be healthy eating. You know, journaling, keeping our commitments. Being self-aware or persistent.

Theodore Roosevelt said, *"With self-discipline, almost anything is possible."* And I would flip that to say without discipline, you know, hardly anything is possible. You know, self-discipline is one of the keys to a successful and happy life, whether it's yoga or business or sports.

And the thing about it is: when you think about self-discipline, you think it's about determination and fortitude and the strength to continue to carry out and overcome adversity. But something that's even more important than that in terms of self-discipline is having the self-control and the ability to not fall prey to our bad habits like laziness and procrastination and irresponsibility.

So, discipline is doing the things we need to do and making sure we do them and see them through, but also to have the discipline to not do the things that'll take us down and have us drift off course.

What area in your life would benefit most if you were a little bit more disciplined with daily practice and with small, consistent habits? It's powerful. It is the key to success. Self-discipline.

The fourth one is **SELF-STUDY**. Self-study and self-awareness are the foundations of all meaningful spiritual and personal growth. Because you can't transform unless you are self-aware: until you understand who you are and what's going on. What's working; what isn't working.

Self-awareness is about clearly seeing your own thoughts and being honest about your emotions and your behavioral patterns and your hidden motivations. Self-study is the deliberate practice of examining

your inner life. And the more that we examine our inner life, the more it helps us develop and change and transform.

So, anybody know what the three words written on the Greek temple of Apollo at Delphi? Okay, I'll tell you. It is, *"Know thy self."* That the secret and the key to success and happiness and profound change is to know thy self. To look beyond the societal expectations and external validation to see and know the authentic truth of who you are.

Self-study for spiritual growth begins with self-observation, so we can dissolve the ego to realize the interconnectedness that we have with the larger whole.

Eric Butterworth, in his book, says that we can do as much outer space exploration as we want, but the thing that will get us further individually and collectively is to do some inner space exploration. To sit and be still and tune in with that Higher Power. To hang in and just be one with the Divine that is where how we have been created in its image and likeness.

You know, there's a depth of Oneness I don't think most of us have touched. And we know that that potential is there. But the question is: Are we willing to do that self-study? Are we willing to do that deep dive into who we really are as amazing spiritual beings?

And the last one is **SURRENDER**. Surrender is not giving up. I always think of surrender as giving way to a Higher Intelligence and Power to move through our lives.

Surrender is about dropping fear, dropping all of our resistance so we can be a greater channel of love and light and goodness and wisdom. Surrender, to me, is the greatest depth of letting go, and one of the highest demonstrations of truly trusting. To let go fully to Spirit and absolutely trust that whatever good or guidance that will flow through us will be the highest and best thing we could experience.

I love when St. Francis said, *"Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace."* If you could speak that prayer and intention, what would it be? *"Lord, make me an instrument of thy" ...?* Joy? Or compassion? Or understanding? Or wisdom? What would it be that you would want Spirit to flow through you more as you fully surrender to life?

Jesus surrendered fully, and he said the words, *"The Father and I are one."*

A businessman ordered flowers to be sent to the opening of his friend's new branch office. When the businessman got there, he was shocked to see flowers with the inscription, *"Rest in peace."* He was so outraged, he stopped by the floral shop to talk to the florist and to complain. The florist said, *"You know, it could have been worse. Just think: today somewhere was buried a person beneath a floral arrangement with the inscription, 'Congratulations on your new location.'"* [Congregants laugh] And yoga is kind of about that: kind of going to a deeper and new location.

And so, the five practices for us are:

Purity; you know, to clear out what is no longer serving us to open a space, you know, for greater peace and clarity.

The second one is contentment. Do not postpone your happiness anymore. Find acceptance and peace. Just make peace with life and just enjoy it right here and right now. Don't wait.

And then the third one is self-discipline: to choose to do the things you need to do when you need to do them and to not do the things that will take you down or take you away from your goal.

And then self-study: to know the depth of who you are spiritually and to turn within and to find it.

And finally, surrender, which is to release yourself into your Higher Power and to your higher possibility. You know, we're all on a path, you know, to know our oneness with the Divine.

We're all on a path to unify the consciousness -- the human consciousness – with the Infinite. And one of the best ways we can do it is to practice these five ethics of yoga.

God bless you all!

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