

NIYAMA-S

Personal Self-Care

नियम

As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world as in being able to remake ourselves.

MOHANDAS K. GANDHI

THE SECOND LIMB OF YOGA brings our attention to our body and immediate surroundings. The *niyama-s* are like internal (*ni*) *yama-s*. The first limb was about behaving ethically toward others. Now we treat ourselves with care and improve our quality by observing ourselves and implementing changes in our lives that can transform our personality and contribute to our contentment and happiness.

The most external *niyama* is cleanliness, keeping our body, mind, and surroundings free of clutter and impurities. Next is being content with and grateful for who we are and what we have. The final three *niyama-s* compose *kriyā-yoga*, a powerful trio of practices that can be applied every day and that transform our negative habitual patterns into positive action. Each of the *niyama-s* will be discussed in individual chapters.

Niyama 1: *Śauca* (cleanliness of body, heart-mind, and surroundings)

Niyama 2: *Santoṣa* (contentment)

Niyama 3: *Tapas* (practice causing positive change)

Niyama 4: *Svādhyāya* (study by and of oneself)

Niyama 5: *Īśvara-praṇidhāna* (humility and faith)

If we do not take care of ourselves, how can we take care of others? When we are young, we may feel somewhat invincible, thinking that we can do whatever we want to our body and mind without any consequences. As we grow older, we pay the price. For example, college students who drink like fish may end up as alcoholics, or children who grow up eating fast food all the time may end up with Type 2 diabetes.

To live according to yoga, it is our responsibility as individuals to spend time and effort maintaining our body, breath, heart, and mind. Moderation is crucial. It is easy to have lots of fun without trashing your body or mind. Taking good care of our bodies throughout life enables us to avoid much pain and discomfort. A healthy body, with healthy breath, heart, and mind, is a fit vessel for accessing our divine inner light of awareness.



THOUGHTS

Taking care of myself is part of practicing yoga.

When I practice the five *niyama*-s, I begin to self-reflect and learn who I am inside.

A calm, clutter-free environment helps me feel content and able to commence the practice of *kriyā-yoga*.

EXERCISES

What do I do now to practice self-care?

How do I feel about my self-care practices? Do they feel like an obligation, or do they give me pleasure?

What other self-care practices would I like to incorporate into my life? Will these be easy to implement? If not, why?