



The Yamas and Niyamas

The worldly man has his gaze outward. Our present state of consciousness is bound up with the temporary, changing, perishable, physical body, bound up by ever-changing restless mind characterised by many impurities. It swings between pairs of opposites and is subject to *bhranti*. Our present state is due to our involvement in *Prakriti*. *Prakriti* comprises the three *gunas* and the grossest among them is *tamas* – things that are not at all a compliment to our human nature. The *tamasic* aspect of our personality carries with it the propensity to cruelty, violence, hatred and anger. It is something that is uncivilised, uncultured, very gross, not refined. This unregenerate nature of the individual is the direct outcome of the *tamo guna* in *prakriti*. And this is contrary to normal human nature. It is declared to be *mala*, the impurity, in the individual.

The elimination and eradication of this *mala* is one of the first objectives of the science of Yoga. To stop this headlong plunge in the direction of these impure patterns of thinking, speaking and behaving, the five *yamas* or vows have been prescribed by Patanjali. These vows have to be strictly adhered to at all times, in all places, under all circumstances. Here is no question of any excuse; they are to be absolutely adhered to. Only then can man's age-old impure habits and instincts be overcome. As long as these propensities are there, evolution is a far cry. If properly practised, *yama* succeeds in arresting the progress of the *jiva*, the individual soul, in ungodly, undivine, unspiritual direction. And *niyama* has the effect of diverting the flow in the higher direction towards the Spirit. Practice of *yama* purifies one's nature and establishes him in *sadhachara* or perfect godliness.

Anything impermanent can never give eternal satisfaction. The seeker is after eternal satisfaction, which will bestow fullness. His aim is the highest consciousness of the infinite plentitude where there is no more desire not more want, and therefore, no more sorrow. To have the Experience of that eternal Absolute State and to have the Atmic Consciousness, in addition to becoming saintly and moral, he seeks to become spiritual also. His life has to rise from *sadachara* to spirituality. Therefore, *niyama* is prescribed which consists of *shaucha* (internal and external purity), *santosha* (contentment), *tapas* (austerity), *swadhyayay* (study of scriptures) and *Ishvara-pranidhana* (self-surrender to the Lord). These observances will channelize your life Godward.

God Bless You!

■ Swami Chidananda