

**The Science of Upanishads – Part 40: Foundations of Modern Yoga Practice**  
**(Contd.): Description of Yama (The Rules) as The First Anga (Limb) of The**  
**Ashtanga Yoga (Eight Limbed Yoga) of The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali**  
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The last week's Mandir Bulletin outlined eight Angas (limbs) of Ashtanga Yoga (Eight-limbed Yoga) in Yoga Sutras of Patanjali: **(1) Yama** – Ethical Rules, **(2) Niyama** – Discipline or Virtuous Habits, **(3) Asana** - Physical Poses, **(4) Pranayama** - Breath Exercises, **(5) Pratyahara** - Withdrawal of the Senses from External Objects, **(6) Dharana** – Concentration, **(7) Dhyana** - Meditation, and **(8) Samadhi** - Complete Realization. We will discuss each of these Angas (Limbs) in detail in the upcoming Mandir Bulletins including this one, which deals with Yama, the first Anga.

Yamas are ethical rules of Hinduism and can be thought of as moral imperatives. **The Five Yamas listed by Patanjali in Yogasūtra 2.30 are:**

1. **Ahimsa (अहिंसा):** Nonviolence, non-harming other living beings
2. **Satya (सत्य):** truthfulness, non-falsehood
3. **Asteya (अस्तेय):** non-stealing
4. **Brahmacharya (ब्रह्मचर्य):** chastity, fidelity or sexual restraint
5. **Aparigraha (अपरिग्रह):** non-avarice, non-possessiveness

Yama is the first step in Patanjali's eight steps of Yoga, the foundation on which the yogi begins to build his spiritual life. He harmonizes his body and mind with the divine laws of nature, or creation, producing an inner and outer well-being, happiness, and strength that attract the devotee to deeper spiritual practices.

A man is not yet a master if he is still engaged in the ordinary life-battles—those of sensory temptations, desires, habits; identification with the physiology and limitations of the body; restlessness of mental doubts and complexes; and soul ignorance. His perceptions are limited, and include consciousness of bodily weight and other physiological conditions; of internal sensations, arising from activities of the inner organs and of the breath within the body; of sensations of touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight; of hunger, thirst, pain, passion, attachment, sleepiness, fatigue, wakefulness; and of his mental powers of reasoning, feeling, and willing. The consciousness of this ordinary man is subject to fears about death, poverty, disease, and innumerable other ills. He is bound by attachments to name, social standing, family, race, and possessions.

**Ahimsa (noninjury) is extolled in the Hindu scriptures.** The prohibition refers to the wanton destruction of any of God's creatures: human beings, animals, or plants. However, when it is a matter of survival, a man is justified in saving his own life at the expense of other lives, which are lesser manifestations of Divinity. It is impossible to live without harming or killing plants. Each day millions of bacteria perish in man's body. No one can drink any liquid or breathe any air without destroying many microscopic forms of life. When asked about Ahimsa, **Mahatma Gandhi** in 1936 described it in a single phrase, **"The avoidance of harm to any living creature in thought or deed."** A man of nonviolence neither willfully causes nor wishes harm to any.

Likewise, Truthfulness is another important component of Yama. The worlds are built on truth," says the Mahabharata. Men and civilizations stand or fall according to their attitude toward truth. By honoring the principle of truth in his thoughts, speech, and actions, a Yogi puts himself in tune with creation and with the Creator.

[Read Here for More on Yama, the first of the eight principal steps of Ashtanga Yoga described in Yoga Sutras of Patanjali](#)

*Stay tuned for more discussion on each of the eight Angas (limbs) of Ashtanga Yoga...*