

Ethic and Etiquette in Yoga

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A better life through the ethical awareness given by the yoga practices. A better world, too? Yama and Nyama in our everyday life.

As any yoga practitioner that explored yoga for a while knows, the first 2 of the 8 limbs (Ashtanga/8-limbs) of the classical Patanjali's Yoga are ethical precepts, or advises about how to develop an awareness regarding our actions and our interactions with the people and the environment around us.

What this has to do with stretching out muscles and with glamorous acrobatic, physical exercises? Nothing, in fact. But if the goal of our yoga practices is more than simply stretching our legs, if the goal is to explore a state of Yoga, Union, with our Self, with our body, with our breathing and with the life around us, those ethical precepts can be very relevant.

The first of these precepts is called Ahimsa which means "to not harm". A person which practices yoga becomes, with time, naturally more incline to understand (or better, "to feel") his/her emotions and as well those of the people interacting with him/her. This deeper type of perception makes the yogi more incline to compassion, and as a consequence, more incline to avoid harming himself or the people around him.

This process works a bit like this: if I have pain in my hand I take care of my hand and I try to heal my hand, because the hand is part of me. If I perceive the beings around me as part of me as well, like my hand is, I will naturally take care of them too, "cause I perceive their pain (as well as their joy) as part of me. This is how compassion works and this is the reason why the ancient yogis developed this ethical precept called Ahimsa.

Besides, if we think about that also in a mere logical/practical way, to have a compassionate perception of life will make our society a better place for everyone, because everyone will tend to be more service minded and more caring toward each others.

Ahimsa is just the first of the ethical precepts of Yama and Nyama, there are other precepts equally important like for example Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (too give up the desire of acquiring what is not rightly one's own) Aparigraha (the non-acceptance of such amenities and comforts of life that are superfluous for the preservation of the physical existence) Brahmacharya (the ability of recognising everything as an expression of Brahma, the Infinite Consciousness, and to tune-in our actions with that perception).

And then there are also the Nyamas, other precepts which includes for example, Saucha (cleanliness).

So, not very fancy advises really, I would say that they are basically just common sense to apply to our life to develop a more smooth and peaceful existence.

But in a very practical sense, how can we use these ethical precepts during our day?

Let's start with some very basic situations that we experience when we are in our yoga studio, for example. How is our attitude towards the others when we are in the studio? Do we see them as friends, as equals, as part of us, or do we see them as annoying competitors? If somebody forgot his/her blanket, do we feel like sharing our blanket with him/her?

How can we contribute to build up a peaceful and meditative atmosphere in a studio? To have a mobile phone lying beside us and flashing every time we receive a notification helps us and the others to concentrate or it rather steals our attention?

Is it a good idea to keep our shoes inside the studio beside our yoga mat, close to the yoga mat of the others (or of the teacher's)? With those shoes we have walked all around, it is not nice to bring dirt in a place that we use to relax and to purify our perceptions.

If everyone is silent, is it a good idea to chat with the friends beside us, or to cough loudly and repeatedly like if nobody is there?

These are just few example of how we can apply in a practical way the ethical awareness which derives from our yoga practices.

There are millions of people practising yoga today. Imagine what the world could rapidly become if all of us will make a conscious effort to apply these ethical points in our everyday life. Any minute of our day, any relationship could become a beautiful moment of Yoga and peace!