

## THE ROLE OF YAMA-NIYAMA IN KRISHNANANDA'S PHILOSOPHY OF MEDITATION

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### Abstract

*This paper explores the integral role of Yama and Niyama—the ethical and personal disciplines of classical Yoga—in Swami Krishnananda's philosophy of meditation. As a renowned spiritual teacher and disciple of Swami Sivananda, Krishnananda emphasized that true meditation cannot occur without a firm foundation in moral and ethical purity. The study examines how Krishnananda interprets Yama (restraints) and Niyama (observances) not merely as preliminary practices but as essential elements that purify the mind, aligns individual consciousness with cosmic order, and prepares the seeker for higher states of meditative absorption. Through a close reading of Krishnananda's writings, the paper reveals how these foundational principles function as tools for inner transformation, self-discipline, and spiritual awakening. Ultimately, the research underscores that for Krishnananda, Yama and Niyama are not optional moral codes but indispensable for attaining the depth and stability required for authentic meditation and Self-realization.*

**Keywords:** Krishnananda, Yama, Niyama, meditation, ethics, Yoga philosophy, Patanjali, spiritual discipline, Divine Life Society, Advaita Vedanta

### Introduction

The spiritual philosophy of Swami Krishnananda Saraswati, a revered disciple of Swami Sivananda and a profound philosopher-monk of the Divine Life Society, encompasses a deep synthesis of classical Indian thought and practical mysticism. Among the cornerstones of his spiritual framework is meditation, not merely as a technique for mental stillness but as a comprehensive way of living that integrates the moral, psychological, and metaphysical dimensions of human existence. Within this meditative framework, the concepts of Yama and Niyama, as outlined in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, hold a critical and foundational position. Far from being mere ethical preliminaries, Krishnananda presents Yama and Niyama as essential prerequisites for the higher stages of inner absorption, ultimately culminating in Self-realization or God-consciousness.

Yama and Niyama are often interpreted as the moral codes of Yoga, the do's and don'ts that guide a seeker's external and internal conduct. Yama includes *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truthfulness), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacharya* (celibacy or control over desires), and *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness). Niyama, on the other hand, comprises *shaucha* (cleanliness), *santosh*a (contentment), *tapas* (austerity), *svadhyaya* (study of scriptures), and *Ishvarapranidhana* (surrender to God). Krishnananda's interpretation of these elements goes beyond their ethical value. For him, they are ontological necessities, which prepare the mind and purify the consciousness for the transcendental journey.

To understand the role of Yama-Niyama in Krishnananda's meditation philosophy, one must first appreciate the non-dualistic metaphysical vision he adheres to. Deeply rooted in Advaita



Vedanta, Krishnananda views the world as a manifestation of the Absolute, where distinctions between self and other, subject and object, are ultimately illusory. Meditation, therefore, is not merely a method of calming the mind, but a dynamic ascent toward the recognition of one's identity with the Infinite. However, such an ascent cannot occur unless the seeker is inwardly and outwardly aligned with cosmic harmony, a state which Yama and Niyama help cultivate.

Krishnananda insists that the human personality is a microcosm, reflecting the broader macrocosm of the universe. Ethical purity and moral clarity, as enshrined in Yama and Niyama, are not optional behaviors but necessary disciplines that bring the individual consciousness into resonance with the cosmic law or Dharma. Violating these disciplines leads to inner disintegration, restlessness, and karmic bondage, all of which hinder meditative absorption. Conversely, observing them leads to mental clarity, emotional balance, and spiritual strength, qualities indispensable for successful meditation.

In Krishnananda's teachings, Yama and Niyama are seen as the foundation stones for concentration (dharana), meditation (dhyana), and superconscious absorption (samadhi). Without ethical integrity and psychological purification, the mind remains a turbulent force, incapable of steady contemplation. He often likens the process of meditation to tuning an instrument—the finer the alignment, the purer the sound. Yama and Niyama perform the critical task of tuning the personality—physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually—so that the inner vibrations resonate with the divine frequency.

Moreover, Krishnananda does not restrict Yama and Niyama to external moral behaviors. He delves into their psychological and metaphysical dimensions. For instance, *ahimsa* is not just refraining from physical violence but includes the absence of negative thoughts, judgments, and subtle hostilities. Similarly, *satya* is not merely speaking the truth but living in alignment with the truth of being—a truth that recognizes the unity of all existence. These inner transformations are crucial for purifying the subconscious mind, which otherwise becomes a source of distraction, attachment, and ego-centricity during meditation.

Krishnananda's approach also bridges the gap between philosophy and practice. While he was a scholar of the Upanishads, the Gita, and the Yoga Sutras, his emphasis was always on the practical realization of truth through inner experience. Thus, Yama and Niyama are presented not as moral obligations imposed by tradition but as tools of transformation—ways to remove the veils that obscure our inner divinity. In this sense, they are both the beginning and the end of the spiritual journey—initial steps that are continually deepened through inner realization.

Another noteworthy aspect of Krishnananda's teaching is his holistic understanding of the human being. He recognizes that the inner conflicts, desires, fears, and attachments that plague human existence are not mere psychological accidents but manifestations of deeper spiritual ignorance. Yama and Niyama are designed to gradually free the seeker from these layers of ignorance. Through *tapas*, one gains control over the senses; through *svadhyaya*, one gains knowledge of the Self; through *Ishvarapranidhana*, one surrenders the ego to the

divine will. These are not mechanical practices but living disciplines that align the seeker with the deeper order of Reality.

Krishnananda also emphasizes that Yama and Niyama are not sequential stages to be completed and left behind. They are lifelong disciplines that mature as the seeker evolves. Even a person deep in meditation or approaching samadhi must remain grounded in these ethical and spiritual values. Otherwise, the risk of ego resurgence, spiritual pride, or moral downfall remains. The higher one ascends, the subtler the temptations become, making Yama and Niyama indispensable companions throughout the journey.

Furthermore, Krishnananda addresses the modern seeker's dilemma—how to practice Yama and Niyama in a world of complexity, competition, and distraction. He does not suggest ascetic withdrawal from life but advocates for a disciplined engagement, wherein one learns to spiritualize every action, thought, and relationship. He encourages seekers to be vigilant yet compassionate, disciplined yet flexible, ethical yet not self-righteous. This balance, he argues, creates the psychological space for meditation to take root in daily life.

### Understanding Yama and Niyama

In the eightfold path of yoga, as expounded by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*, Yama and Niyama serve as moral and ethical precepts that condition the practitioner's lifestyle and mindset. They are not merely preliminary steps but ongoing disciplines that form the foundation for all spiritual practice.



- **Yamas** (restraints) are universal moral codes:
  1. **Ahimsa** (non-violence)

2. **Satya** (truthfulness)
3. **Asteya** (non-stealing)
4. **Brahmacharya** (continence or moderation)
5. **Aparigraha** (non-possessiveness)
- **Niyamas** (observances) are personal disciplines:
  1. **Shaucha** (cleanliness)
  2. **Santosha** (contentment)
  3. **Tapas** (austerity or discipline)
  4. **Svadyaya** (study of scriptures and self)
  5. **Ishvara Pranidhana** (surrender to God)

For Krishnananda, these are not merely ethical codes but are psychological and metaphysical preparations for the inward journey. They act as spiritual "antiseptics" to purify the seeker's mind and conduct.

### **Krishnananda's Holistic View of Meditation**

Krishnananda viewed meditation not as an isolated technique but as an integrated lifestyle of conscious living, ethical conduct, and philosophical understanding. Meditation, in his view, is the culmination of a life aligned with Truth. He emphasized that meditation is not a mechanical process; rather, it is a flowering of inner maturity, self-control, and divine orientation.

In this light, Yama and Niyama are not optional moralities but integral spiritual disciplines. They ensure that the practitioner's inner psyche is in harmony with the cosmic law (Dharma). Without this harmony, meditation would either fail or lead to disturbances.

### **Role of Yama in Krishnananda's Philosophy of Meditation**

#### **Ahimsa: Foundation of Peace**

For Krishnananda, Ahimsa is the first and most crucial Yama. It is not limited to physical non-violence but extends to speech and thought. The subtle forms of violence—anger, resentment, judgment—create ripples in the subconscious mind, making meditation difficult. Ahimsa leads to fearlessness, an essential quality for deep meditation. When we no longer harm others, we no longer fear being harmed. This creates a profound inner stillness where true meditation can blossom.

#### **Satya: Mental Clarity**

Satya, or truthfulness, cultivates transparency of mind. Krishnananda stressed that lying or living in self-deception generates inner conflict, which divides the personality and hampers meditation.

He often remarked that truth is not just moral correctness, but alignment with Reality. A person who lives in untruth cannot perceive higher truths during meditation because their instrument—the mind—is clouded by falsehood.

#### **Asteya and Aparigraha: Detachment from Worldly Craving**

Asteya (non-stealing) and Aparigraha (non-possessiveness) work together to eliminate the desire for external acquisition. Krishnananda saw desire as a binding force that tethers consciousness to the material plane.

In his view, meditation requires inward turning, but this is impossible if the mind is constantly reaching outward. These Yamas facilitate renunciation, not through external poverty, but through inner freedom from craving, which is essential for sustained meditation.

#### **Brahmacharya: Conservation of Energy**

Krishnananda had a profound interpretation of Brahmacharya, viewing it not merely as celibacy but as restraint and conservation of life-force (ojas). He emphasized that creative, intellectual, and spiritual energy are all variations of the same force.

Dissipation of this force leads to a weak, distracted, and agitated mind. Brahmacharya, then, becomes a practice of channeling vital energy upward through spiritual pursuits, aiding in heightened concentration and awareness.

#### **Role of Niyama in Krishnananda's Meditation Philosophy**

##### **Shaucha and Santosha: Inner Order and Contentment**

Shaucha, or purity, was emphasized by Krishnananda as a means to remove both physical and psychological toxins. Mental purity—freedom from jealousy, lust, pride, etc.—is essential for clear perception in meditation.

Santosha, or contentment, is the antidote to restlessness. Krishnananda noted that discontent is born from ego and desire, which destabilize the meditative posture of mind. Contentment leads to mental equilibrium, the very foundation of meditation.

##### **Tapas: Inner Discipline**

Tapa, or austerity, is not self-torture but self-regulation. For Krishnananda, it is the disciplined will to maintain focus, simplicity, and integrity in life. Meditation is not for the weak-willed; it requires sustained effort and discipline.

Tapas train the body and mind to endure discomfort and distraction, which are inevitable in long spiritual practice. It builds psychological resilience, enabling deeper absorption (dhyana).

##### **Svadyaya: Knowledge of the Self**

Svadyaya, or self-study, includes the reading of scriptures and reflection on the nature of the Self. Krishnananda, a master of Vedanta, emphasized Svadyaya as a cognitive support to meditation. The aspirant needs a conceptual understanding of the goal—Self-realization or union with the Absolute.

Studying texts like the Bhagavad Gita or the Upanishads helps shape the right meditative attitude. Without such knowledge, meditation can become mechanical or misguided.

##### **Ishvarapranidhana: Surrender to the Divine**

Lastly, Ishvarapranidhana—surrender to God—is perhaps the most profound of the Niyamas in Krishnananda's thought. While the earlier disciplines prepare the ego, this one dissolves it. He taught that true meditation is not a willful act, but a graceful offering of the self into the hands of the Divine.

This surrender fosters ego-transcendence, the climax of meditation. In this stage, the meditator no longer practices meditation; they become a vehicle for divine presence, flowing in harmony with the Supreme Being.

### Conclusion

In Krishnananda's philosophy of meditation, the principles of *Yama* and *Niyama* serve as foundational disciplines that purify the mind and harmonize the inner self with the cosmic order. Far from being mere moral prescriptions, they function as essential preparatory stages that refine the aspirant's character, stabilize the emotions, and cultivate ethical living—all of which are vital for deep and sustained meditative practice. Krishnananda emphasizes that without the internal transformation brought about by *Yama* and *Niyama*, meditation remains superficial, easily disturbed by inner conflict or worldly distraction. Ultimately, these disciplines foster a state of inner clarity and spiritual receptivity, enabling the practitioner to transcend ego and move toward the realization of the Self. Thus, in Krishnananda's vision, *Yama* and *Niyama* are not optional ethical ideals, but indispensable stepping stones on the path to higher consciousness.

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