

The Eight Limbs of Ashtanga Yoga From Patanjali's Yoga Sūtra

YAMA

Restraint ~ Precepts of how to live in the world

The first of the 8 limbs is called yama, which concerns our behavior and attitude towards things and people outside ourselves. Within "Yama" there are 5 behavior patterns or disciplines.

Ahimsā

The first of these disciplines is called Ahimsā, which can be translated as non-violence or non-harming in thought, word or deed. It sounds simple enough on a grand scale however when you start to investigate you may find yourself being harmful in more ways than you had imagined. There are so many ways to look at Ahimsā; you can think of being vegetarian; of not harming nature; of speaking with loving kindness to everyone from your loved ones to the clerk at the grocery store; of trying not to have negative thoughts towards others; of being kind to your body during your yoga practice. The list is endless. But don't forget it also includes practicing Ahimsā towards yourself. Therefore, you start where you are. With practice, time, patience you will eventually bring Ahimsa into more areas of your life. For now, just be aware; watch yourself and your dealings with others, your words or thoughts to others and yourself. Then maybe you can decide to eliminate a bit of "himsā" (the opposite of Ahimsā is violence, harming) from your life. Maybe you'll decide to do your best to not say harmful words to your partner. Maybe you'll decide that when dealing with strangers you will treat them with more kindness. You could decide to become vegetarian or even vegan. You could decide to no longer buy packaged vegetables to eliminate the unneeded waste and harm to nature. Perhaps you'll decide to take public transport instead of your car to work. Again the list could go on forever.

Just keep in mind, not to judge, neither yourself nor others. Everyone must start where they are and be thankful for the small improvements. It all counts!!

Satya

What is truth?

The second yama that Patanjali speaks of in the Yoga Sutras is Satya or truthfulness.

Truth seems obvious, either it is the truth or it is not, right? Well, while there is the obvious part: not telling lies, there is also the more subtle truth: truth to yourself. I like something that I once read from Judith Lasater about inner truth and the difference between honesty and integrity. As she says, "honesty is what we do when others are around and might judge our actions or words. To have integrity is to act in an honest manner when others are not around and will never know about our actions." I would even take it a step further than that. How often to do we try to console ourselves with false truths in order to justify our actions, either towards ourselves or towards others? In short, being truthful means telling the truth to both yourself and to others.

My truth versus your truth

Another subtle level of satya is remembering that something may only be "your" truth, not "the" truth. We all have seen that when more than one person tells the story of the same event there are always discrepancies. Is it because one person is lying or is it because that is "their" truth, the way they perceived the events based on their personal way of looking at things? Who's to say their truth is wrong? The practice of yoga normally helps us see clearer and with many years of consistent practice and self-analyses we will come closer to seeing the truth without our personal histories, prejudices and judgments blurring our vision.

Layering Satya on to Ahimsā

The yamas are not to be practiced independently of one another. They are to be layered and melted together into one another. Therefore, part of satya and ahimsa is trying not to speak harmful truths while also not lying. This can be complicated in some situations.

Each individual has to find their way of interpreting the yamas within the context of their lives. Discovering what will make you feel comfortable in your day to day interactions.

Take a simple example. Your mom asks you if you like her new outfit (you think it's horrible). What do you say? You don't want to hurt her, causing "himsā", by telling her it is horrible. Although, you don't want to lie to her just to make her feel good for the moment. Each person will see the situation from a different angle and has to find the solution they feel is most appropriate and closest to their personal values.

This is an example which most likely wouldn't create too much "himsā" if you said the truth and if you decided to say something to make her feel good it could be called a "little white lie" to avoid hurting. Yet, how you deal with this simple situation can be a reflection of how you deal with situations that could cause you to stray into more hurtful miss-truths.

Thoughtfulness

Can you find ways to speak the truth without using hurtful words or tones?

These are some things to keep in mind while you go through your day. Remember just observe yourself in your daily interactions, don't judge. Find a couple of areas where you may feel able to make some changes. But don't fret when you are unable to keep the standards you wish to. No one is perfect. Be kind to yourself!

Asteya

Non-stealing

This yama is pretty straight forward: don't take what does not belong to you. That means objects as well as the subtle things such as not taking someone's self-confidence, happiness, glory, reputation, etc. Becoming aware how simply mocking someone could steal a tiny piece of that person's self-confidence or criticizing someone could steal a tiny piece of happiness. Sometimes we can speak or act without reflection on how a few quick words can take away something so sweet from another; even happy memories can be stolen away by the harsh words of another.

Over consumption

What about taking more of earth's resources than is needed? This is stealing from others who don't have enough because it is taking energy and opportunity away from those who are underprivileged. Think twice every time you purchase something (is it truly needed?) and every time you discard something (where is it going to go?).

Intertwined Yamas

Once again, we see how linked the yama are. It's easy to see how "steeya" (opposite of Asteya is stealing) can lead to "himsā" or harmfulness.

Brahmacarya

Chastity ~ the voluntary control of the sex instinct.

This is one of the more difficult yamas to understand because the intensity of the discipline has many ranges depending on the teachers' interpretation. From total celibacy to how Desikachar describes it in "the Heart of Yoga" as: "...brahmacharya suggests that we should form relationships that foster our understanding of the highest truths. If sensual pleasures are part of those relationships, we must take care that we keep our direction and do not get lost." Desikachar's interpretation can be aligned easier with the modern Western way of life.

"Simply understand and exercise our instincts in their proper contexts." - Georg Feuerstein

Layering with non-harming & truth

In combination with Ahimsā and Satya, it means to not use your sexual energy in ways that could hurt or mislead another. Avoiding sexual obsessions, promiscuity, and mindless sex.

Simply remaining faithful

If one is in a sexual relationship, simply remaining faithful and honest within a monogamous relationship is practicing Brahmacharya. Also, while having sex, remaining in the present, appreciating the beauty and love of the uniting of 2 spirits can be part of the practice.

Celibacy

For some, celibacy may feel like the right choice for them, even if only for a certain period during their life. They may feel that it is more important for them to direct the energy used in sexual relations towards other areas in their life; discovering or healing themselves, devotion to their yoga or meditation practice, devotion to God.

It is all finding what is most appropriate to you, at each stage in your life, while remaining open, aware, non-judging, loving and kind. Not such easy tasks, this is one of the reasons we practice Ashtanga Yoga asanas. Taking the time to care for ourselves to calm and clear the mind, making it easier to stay open, aware, non-judging, loving and kind throughout the day.

Aparigraha

The Fifth Yama

The fifth and final yama is Aparigraha which is commonly translated as “non-greed”. Not being greedy is to only take what is truly necessary and no more.

In a world full of stimulants

Everything around us tells us...buy more, do more, eat more, take more! So how do we know what is more than necessary? We are trained by advertising and our culture to need the latest gadgets, the coolest new trends, a larger home, a newer or faster car, which all claim will make our lives more efficient, interesting, fun and happy. We tell ourselves “I will be happy when” my desires are fulfilled. However on closer inspection, we can see that the acquiring of one desire normally leads to a new desire “which will bring me that long sought after happiness”.

When does it end?

It ends when we are happy with what we have now. That doesn't mean we have no more desires, it just means that we are satisfied with where we are now and that we are aware of being content with only taking what is necessary. Bringing more awareness into our lives so that we can see when we are being greedy or longing too strongly for something.

Not taking advantage of a situation

Greediness does not only come in the form of materialism, you can be greedy when taking advantage of a situation. For example; that loving friend who seems to be there for you non-stop. Listening endlessly, giving always, unlimited understanding. Examine the relationship, are you taking too much? It's easy to take from generous people and forget about “Aparigraha” because they are offering themselves.

In our asana practice

Aparigraha can be applied, as well, to our asana practice by being aware during our practice when we are greedily forcing ourselves into a position, despite our body's obvious reluctance. Or, desiring to have a practice “like so and so”.

NIYAMA

Limb number two is called Niyama. Contraire to the Yamas, which concern our behavior and attitude towards things and people outside ourselves, the niyamas are disciplines to be applied to our attitude towards ourselves. Within the Niyamas, there are five behavior patterns or disciplines that are designed to harmonize our inner life.

Saucha

The first of these behavior patterns which we can use to improve our daily life is called Saucha, commonly translated as purification or cleanliness. The concept is not only physical cleanliness...keeping the body clean, inside and out, but also a cleaner, clearer, undisturbed mind and moral purity.

Inner & Outer Purification

Keeping the external body clean is pretty much a given practice in our society, however, how often do we neglect the internal cleanliness of our bodies? In our society of “efficiency” we tend to put less emphasis on the quality and pureness of the foods we eat. It’s incredible how many preservatives, additives and unneeded additional salt and sugar are added to the food we eat. Make that a little practice; just have a look at the ingredients listed in the things you buy. The first step to change is becoming aware.

An Extension to Body Purification

Another aspect of Saucha that can be considered is the cleanliness of your surroundings. Keeping your home clean and free of clutter. Have you ever tried to practice meditation or yoga in a place where you are surrounded by “stuff”? One-pointed focus comes much easier without an array of distractions. Often cluttered surroundings equal a cluttered mind.

Santosa

What is Contentment?

The dictionary meaning is “to be in a contented state” which is to be “satisfied/happy with what one has”.

Happiness

On becoming parents, this is something we think of often. What is it to be a parent? What do I want to give to our children? The answer that comes to mind each and every time is happiness. Simple right? Every parent wants to raise a happy, contented child. But what is that? Does that mean doing everything possible to give them all the material things they desire? Or, protecting them from the suffering and pain of life? Or, hoping that they will be attractive, talented and highly intelligent? I don’t think it does. Happiness comes from within, not from the external world.

Equanimity

True contentment comes through the state of mind of being able to accept the flows of life as they arrive. That’s not to say you don’t have dreams and goals, it’s just that your state of happiness is not attached to them. You enjoy the process, trusting the twists and turns and the ups and downs of life. That’s not to say, either, that you don’t feel sadness, sorrow or pain. If anything, you sincerely feel it. Feeling is part of living. But, once again, you are able to rest in a state of equanimity.

Cultivating Santosa in the Asana Practice

Sometimes we can lose sight of the cultivation of contentment during our yoga practice. How easy it is to get caught up in the grasping for more. Rather than enjoying the practice; comparing your practice to another person’s or getting lost in the desire to achieve a certain posture at whatever cost to your body, breath and mind or being disappointed on no longer being able to do a posture you could do before. Try accepting your practice as it is today. Just enjoying and appreciating the sensations as they arrive, now, not looking forward, not looking backwards and not looking at your neighbour.

Some Nice Quotes on Happiness

“An unhappy person and a happy one will have different perceptions of the same circumstances. The difference lies not in the circumstances but in the two states of mind.”

“Enjoying the journey is even better than arriving at the destination.”

“Looking for lasting happiness outside yourself is meaningless. It is like expecting to become fit by watching other people exercise.”

“We either make ourselves miserable or we make ourselves happy, the amount of work is the same.” By Carlos Castaneda

Tapas

Austerity / a burning desire in regards to a spiritual practice.

Any spiritual practice that challenges the mind's habit patterns. It is a strong commitment to self-transformation.

Purifying Heat

"To heat" can also imply heating the body to purify it. Our asana and ujjayi pranayama practice heats the body from within which aids in expelling the toxins and impurities built up in our organs, muscles, tissues and blood. This is why it is good to sweat during practice. Proper bandhas and ujjayi breathing will make you sweat more than you would if you did the asanas just as an exercise program. Why is that? . . . When you narrow the passage in which the air enters the body, the air is warmed which heats the body. Keeping the bandhas ensures that the heat and energy is retained.

Not Adding Impurities

So, our practice is continuously cleansing our body of impurities, however another part of Tapas is to avoid adding rubbish to our bodies. In other words, being aware of what you put in so that the body doesn't have to work so hard to get rid of the "rubbish". Do you notice the difference in your sweat when you have been eating clean, healthy food and when you've went on a junk food, drinking or smoking binge? If not, take note next time.

Svādhyāya

Study which leads to knowledge of the self.

The fourth Niyama is Svādhyāya which is translated as self examination. This is a very important part of the yoga. Without it we can go through our lives repeating the same unhealthy patterns or blaming others for our unpleasant experiences over and over again.

Being Quiet

It's difficult in this modern world, full of distractions, to just sit and be quiet. We especially know this with the new responsibilities and demands of parenthood however, it is an immensely rewarding practice to take even 5 or 10 minutes a day to just sit, be quiet and reflect. Whether you add it to the end of your yoga practice or some other time throughout the day, it is definitely needed!

Discovery is Positive

Keep in mind that self examination isn't the same as self criticizing or judgment. There's no need to be hard; just see, be kind and try to understand. Learn -- "wow, that's why I always respond in this way to these types of situation". "How could I do it differently?" Being aware not to blame either. Neither yourself nor others. This develops compassion towards yourself and perhaps to others as well. Others who may not act in the manner that you expect.

Reflecting

Reflecting can help you to see from another's point of view. This can be useful in figuring out why you find yourself in similar unwanted situations time and time again. Or in understanding a unique unwanted experience and letting it go.

It's a Magical Thing...

reflection, because often no effort is needed to improve oneself. Just the mere "awakening" of a certain behavior pattern (or the underlying reasons for the behavior) will bring about change. The simple self awareness, kindness and understanding will spontaneously help you to act differently.

"We cannot perceive our own faults,
And continually examine the faults of others instead.
How can we all be harmonious with one another?"

~Milarepa

Ishvara Pranidhāna

Surrender

The last Niyama and probably the most challenging; Ishvara Pranidhāna, which means surrender to God. If you practice a specific religion then it can be applied to “your” God. If not, then it can be interpreted as surrendering to the interconnectiveness of all or nature. Realizing that the final outcome of any given circumstance is ultimately out of your control and surrendering to that.

Acceptance

Accepting everything as it is whether “good” or “bad”. This isn’t the same as giving in or being complacent. Effort still needs to be made. It takes effort to make changes; changes in yourself and changes in the world but practicing Ishvara Pranidhana is letting go of the expectation of the outcome. Surrendering to the outcome. Making your best effort and then being satisfied with the outcome while enjoying the process now.

Where Are You Going?

It’s very challenging, in our goal oriented society, to be able to enjoy the effort without being attached to the expected outcome. In our society it often isn’t important how you “get there” just “that you get there” (wherever that “there” is). This makes it difficult to enjoy where you are, instead it’s just about where you are going. Then if you don’t get “there” well, one can feel frustration, anger, sadness, jealousy, etc. Where as if we can learn to enjoy the effort and follow the path and be satisfied with the outcome no matter what it is, we would feel much better in ourselves, in the world, within the world!

Have Faith...

That it will be ok. Have you ever found yourself in a situation where it seems nothing is working out the way you wanted it to and then months, or even years, later you realize it was for the best? Or, that if it hadn’t been that way some of the magical things that happened would not have? Ishvara Pranidhana is having faith.

ĀSANA

Posture

This is the most familiar aspect of yoga. When many people talk about yoga they imagine a calm yogi meditating in lotus position or wrapping themselves into a pretzel with their legs behind their head; making yoga seem out of touch for those who are not naturally flexible. However, when you delve deeper you see that anyone can practice asana. No matter their age, size or flexibility. As a matter of fact, I’ve seen some of the most beautiful practices from very stiff students who are incredibly calm, concentrated while staying within their body’s limitations.

What is an Āsana?

It is translated as “posture” or “to sit”. Patanjali describes asana as having two important qualities; sthira and sukha. Sthira is alertness and sukha is relaxation. Therefore one’s asana practice needs to have the dual qualities of an alert mind and a comfortable body.

Alert & Relaxed

We sometimes forget these qualities during asana practice. How often are we straining ourselves for the sake of getting into a posture? Pursing our lips, scrunching our foreheads, tensing our shoulders to hold a position? Next time you practice yoga try, each time you are in a posture, to scan your body for tension. Is your body strong and relaxed?

Effortless Effort

The positions should not be painful. If they are you are at more of tearing a muscle, pulling a ligament, slipping a disk, etc. Sometimes these injuries are not apparent for months or even years after forcing the same muscle or ligament day in and day out. Remember, yoga isn’t a competition, neither with others nor with yourself. The most dynamic postures don’t look it from the outside, it’s only you who can judge how dynamic the position is from the inside. Do you feel strong, relaxed and...

Steadiness of Mind

Do you feel totally aware in the positions? Are you fully focused on the dristi (focal points) and breathe without looking around the room or thinking about what you have to do after your practice? When you find this alertness and ease; that is when the power of this practice will change your life!

Now Have Fun!

Don't forget to enjoy it, keep it fun! If it's fun and you don't incur injuries, you will return to your mat day after day!

PRĀNĀYĀMA

Breath Control

Prānāyāma (regulating the breath) is the fourth limb of the ashtanga yoga system. There are endless exercises of breath control that are used to focus our minds and direct the prana (life force) throughout the body and the mind.

In our ashtanga asana practice we do Ujjayi pranayama; which translates as victorious breath. It's a method that helps us control the length of our in and out breaths and energizes and heats the body to aid in the purification of the asana practice. It heats the body by narrowing the passage in which the air is brought into the body therefore, warming the air and heating the body from within. It energizes by using the full capacity of the lungs therefore, bringing in large amounts of oxygen. The soft sound one creates aids in focusing the mind by giving the hearing senses a sound to listen to; hopefully drowning out the other distractions of the mind or surrounding sounds.

Synchronizing Breath with Movement

Linking the breath and the body; this is what makes our asana practice "yoga" rather than only a set of exercises. The breath dictates the pace of the movement. For example, when you raise your arms over your head at the beginning of a sun salutation; the moment you start your inhalation is the moment you begin to raise the arms and the moment the inhalation is finished is the moment the hands touch over the head. You then ideally continue on this rhythm during the entire practice.

Lengthening

The idea is to keep each inhale and each exhale the exact same length throughout the practice, whether holding a posture or moving into or out of a posture. Deep, smooth breathing calms the mind.

Quality of Breath...

Is more important than the complexity of an asana. Breathing should never be laborious. The quality of the breath tells you the quality of the asana. If you are doing a fancy posture that looks beautiful but is restraining the breath, then you are not doing yoga. The breath will tell you when you are going too far. Listen to it!

Watch Your Breath

Next class make it a project to check your breath throughout the practice. Are the inhales and the exhales the same length? Do they sound the same? Are you using the diaphragm? Are you straining the breath in order to get into a position?

PRATYĀHĀRA

Sense Withdrawal

The fifth limb of Ashtanga Yoga is Pratyāhāra, which is commonly translated as "the withdrawal of the senses". It shouldn't be taken literally; it's not that the senses cease to operate, but that one ceases to be attracted, fascinated, entranced, preoccupied by or drawn into the external world of the senses. In other words, you are not controlled by your senses and your actions aren't driven by the senses.

How do you withdraw the senses?

By focusing the mind, it comes naturally. For example, when reading a very interesting book that you are totally involved in, you may hear the noises around you however, since you are focused on your reading, you are not distracted. Or, while practicing yoga, if you are completely focused on the breathing and the drishtis, the senses will not be attracted to the other practitioners, smells, noises, etc. in the room.

Practicing Pratyahara

You can practice withdrawing the senses by focusing the mind on something (a mantra, your breath, an image, for example) and resisting the temptation of the senses to take you away from your concentration. Normally it is easier to practice this in a quiet room without many external stimulates to take away your focus.

Sensory Perception

You may also practice withdrawing the senses in day to day life by just making an effort to be aware when your senses are dictating your actions. Like when the smell of delicious food, when you are not hungry. Or, the allure of beautiful items in advertisements or store windows of which you have no use for. The senses are never satisfied. When one desire is filled, creating a limited amount of happiness, a new desire emerges, causing frustration, dissatisfaction, envy or anger. And, there goes the cycle until willpower is developed and the mind take control of the senses rather than the other way around.

DHĀRANĀ

Dividing the External & the Internal

Patanjali makes a distinction between the first five limbs and the final three; the first five are in part two of the sutras and are external practices and starting with Dharana (concentration) we enter part three which are internal practices.

Awareness is built in the beginning; awareness on how you treat the world around you and how you treat yourself; awareness of the workings and capabilities/limitations of your body; awareness on the quality and how to change the quality of the breath and direct the prana; and finally, awareness on the senses and how to bring them under the control of the mind. This brings us to...

The Mind!

That careless, reckless mind. It drives us crazy. Literally. It is incredibly strong- strong headed and stubborn!

Sometimes the mind says "no, I cannot do this asana, I'm going to fall, it'll hurt, I'll die" so the body listens. Or, other times the mind says "yes, I can do this position, I did it last week, I always do it, everyone else can do it" therefore, the mind forces the body to do something harmful to itself. How does one find the balance? How does one know when the mind is not respecting the body?

Awareness

Finding the balance comes from experience, practice and discovery. Only you can truly know if you have this awareness (and even then, only the true you, the honest you). There are some external indicators. For example the breathing, unable to hold mula bandha, strain on the face, tension in the shoulders or elsewhere, the feeling of pride or disappointment.

Dhāranā

The first five stages of yoga are used to free the mind from distractions thus setting the stage for the sixth, Dhāranā, which is translated as "concentration". Now the mind can be directed towards a given object or concept. Often we call this meditating but, in fact, it is just preparing us for meditation. First we must learn to concentrate the mind on one thing. This one thing can be your chosen mantra, deity, your breath, a candle flame, a concept, or anything else you find appropriate.

One-Pointed Concentration

The practice is to focus the attention of the mind on one object or concept instead of letting it go in all directions. An example of how the mind can go in different directions: Have you ever been reading a book while thinking of something else? You reach the end of the page only to realize you have no idea what you just read!

Use your Yoga Practice

At the end of your practice sit, find a point of focus and practice Dhāranā. If you don't have enough time, eliminate a couple of the last positions of the series, in order to give your mind the opportunity to establish one-pointed concentration. Or, hold the seated finishing asanas longer and use the Ujjayi breathing as your point of concentration. Maybe one day you will enter meditation (extended periods of concentration naturally lead to this). It's difficult but don't have expectations and just try!

DHYĀNA

The 7th limb of Ashtanga Yoga is Dhyāna, means meditation. As mentioned earlier; what is often mistakenly called meditation is actually Dhāranā, concentration. This is quite a feat in its own right!

What's the Difference between Concentration & Meditation?

Ekāgratā and ekātanatā. When concentrating there is ekāgratā, one pointed attention. When meditating there is ekātanatā, an uninterrupted flow of attentive awareness. In other words, when we are concentrating an effort is made to keep the awareness, slowly the disruptions of the thoughts decrease. In meditation there is a relaxation of effort in keeping the disruptions away and there is uninterrupted flow of awareness.

Moving Meditation

Dhyāna can be achieved during an asana practice. This is one of the advantages of the Mysore style or self-practice of the ashtanga asana series because Dhyāna cannot be achieved if you have to focus on the teacher leading the class (not to say that those classes don't have their benefits!). Have you ever felt during practice that you are keenly aware without focus? In other words, you move through the postures without thinking of them (or anything else) and you feel a strong connection to the practice. You are connected to your breath and the movement. This is Dhyāna, this is why the Ashtanga asana system is often described as a moving meditation. You are completely aware of what you are doing but without making an effort to focus.

Daily Practice

It just comes from the daily practice of Dhāranā on your breath; concentrating on your breath. Not letting the mind wander and using the gaze towards the drishtis to aid in the concentration on the breath. It is difficult to do but if you achieve it for even a fraction of your practice, you will feel great!

Eliminating Distraction

Although to achieve this you will have to have achieved a minimum degree of the previous six stages of yoga described by Patanjali. Otherwise the mind will be too distracted by the external world and the struggle with the mind in trying too hard to attain perfection in the asanas or wanting to do more asanas. Remember, ideally yoga is to calm the mind, not to be a gymnast or do esthetically beautiful poses. The side effect of asana practice is a strong, supple, healthy body which is useful in calming the mind. If the body is full of disease and aches and pains, it makes meditation more difficult (not impossible, however). If your knee hurts in every posture, it will be difficult to bring the mind away from the distraction of that pain.

Until you feel steady and comfortable in a significant portion of your practice, you can at least work on Dhāranā and eventually Dhyāna during part of your practice. That may even be only the last seating positions.

SAMĀDHI

Bliss

The final stage of classical ashtanga yoga is Samādhi, translated as “to merge” or “absorption”. What is it that is being merged? It’s the merging of the meditator with the object of meditation. Wow, sounds very complex! Yes and no. To be in a constant state of Samādhi is very complex however, one can experience mini-samādhis.

Mini-Samādhis

Consider this: An artist is creating, is completely one, merged with his art, he is creating without the thinking mind, without effort, it is almost as if it is just happening however, he is completely aware of his creation and there isn’t “an” artist and “the” art; they are one. This is a mini-samādhī. It may last a few seconds or a few minutes, or more. If you are or have ever been an artist you may recognize this event and know the difference between trying to create and just creating.

Very Clear Understanding

To be in a constant state of Samādhi is one of the highest goals of yoga. The meditator becomes completely aware of the interconnectedness between all living things, being able to observe things accurately without the thinking mind judging or analyzing everything; seeing that everything is perfect just as it is. What a wonderful goal, to be able to be at peace and happy with all as it is...yourself, others, the world!

No Practice

Samādhi cannot be practiced, one cannot say “okay, now I’m going to sit down and try to be in Samādhi”. It just happens; although, you can use certain techniques to help bring about a state of Samādhi. Āsana and prānāyāma are the first steps to make the conditions right for Pratyāhāra, Dhāranā, Dhyāna and finally Samādhi.

Begin Where You Are & Enjoy It

So continue your asana and prānāyāma practice. Start where you are and be thankful for the small improvements. It all counts!

“The most important thing in life is to be happy and not harm others, and moreover if you can help others that would be excellent. We don’t need to overcomplicate things with all sorts of wandering discursive thoughts, superstitions, doubts and hesitations and over-thinking everything. Be strong and straightforward within, have strong intention, and develop firm faith, devotion and inner conviction; don’t give up. “

~ His Holiness the Twelfth Gyalwang Drukpa