OM beginnings

Living the teachings — yoga’s everyday spiritual meanings

**The first Niyama: Saucha (purity)**

There are “eight limbs” of yoga, the postures (asanas) make up just one limb, when we really “get” yoga, we grow to understand that it is about so much more than simply adopting postures and moving the body. The Niyamas are the second limb of the eight limbs of yoga. They specifically remind us of our duties towards ourselves and are considered to be character building, encouraging us to look inwards as opposed to the Yamas which largely have an external/social focus, looking at our relationship with others.

The first Niyama, Saucha, stems from the word purity, and talks about cleanliness of the body, mind, spirit and environment. Today we commonly obsess about external cleanliness, whether it be our physical bodies or our environment. Although this is important, Saucha refers also to the inward journey of purification.

Ancient yogis placed a great deal of emphasis on keeping their bodies pure and free from infection/pollution so that they could strengthen the body and insulate the mind. They engaged in cleansing processes believing it to be necessary in order to achieve brightness, lightness and clarity, all leading towards a higher vibrational state.

Such purifying processes which may still be relevant today include, tongue scraping, oil pulling (to remove bacteria from the mouth) and using neti pots to rinse out the nasal cavities. Breathing practices and certain yoga asanas (especially twists and inversions) also help to cleanse us. We are also encouraged to eat wholesome foods, increase our physical exercise and drink more water in order to purify the body.

All forms of purification have the intention of lightening the loads that we are carrying, whatever that load may consist of. That load may be a polluted body via our food or the air that we breath. It could equally be that you are surrounding yourself with toxic people or carrying the heavy baggage of victimhood, anything that weighs down your body, mind or spirit. Saucha encourages us to do whatever it takes to get rid of this heaviness. We should strive towards being the truest, purest version of ourselves and recognise and act on what does and does not serve us. Health and happiness is then more likely to follow as our bodies become more alive and our minds become more clear.