OM beginnings

Living the teachings — yoga’s everyday spiritual meanings

**The fifth Niyama: Ishvara Pranidhana: self-surrender**

 The Niyama’s 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 fifth Niyama, Ishvara Pranidhana is the practice of bowing to a force greater than ourselves, whatever we consider our god to be. It is often referred to as a “jewel” and indeed it is, the jewel of surrender. It is the jewel in the crown because the ultimate attainment of the state of yoga relates most directly to this niyama. However, it is also potentially the most challenging of the teachings, asking us to redirect our energy away from personal dramas, to surrender our ego and instead to take a look at the bigger picture of our life.

 In many ways it brings together all the other teachings. As we grow and reflect upon the skills that are asked of us in all the other yamas and niyama’s, we are asked to surrender, to release our need for control and embrace our life just as it is by going with the flow. It makes us appreciate how futile it is to try and control and micro-manage our way through life and this approach just makes the journey more constricted and limiting. Doug Keller (yoga expert) uses the imagery of ice cubes floating in a stream to help us grasp this concept. He says that our life is like a flowing stream, and we are ice cubes in the stream, frozen in our fears and anxieties. Ishvara Pranidhana encourages us to thaw out and become one with the flow of the stream, trusting life instead of fighting with it.

Look at your own life and think of examples where you might actually be fighting with life. Do you attempt to control your diet, body, relationships and emotions? Does it leave you feeling drained and disappointed? The likely answer is yes. Ishvara Pranidhana in your own life could look like trusting your children to do the right thing instead of endlessly worrying about them, delegation of tasks at work or home instead of doing everything yourself and not throwing a tantrum when things don’t go your way. It is ultimately about accepting that there is a divine force at work in our lives and what will be, will be.

Savasana (corpse pose) is a wonderful example of practicing surrender. In savasana there is nothing to do, we are asked to lie, release all tension from our bodies and trust that the body will renew itself. It is in savasana that we learn the meaning of “letting go” for many people this is not an easy thing to do just as in the same way, Ishvara Pranidhana is challenging.

To conclude, whether it’s surrendering to a moment of difficulty or a moment of joy, surrendering the results of our actions, or simply learning to trust in the universe a little more; each time we *do* choose to surrender, we move closer to freedom.