



Vamam:

the five vows
of the seeker

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Spirituality is not a path for the faint hearted. Swami Vivekananda has said, “I need lions and not sheep.” Have you wondered why the great Master has spoken so? It is because every single moment we are working on our self. Every moment of our existence we are refining our lifestyle to ensure the blossoming of our consciousness. [In a previous article](#), I touched upon the journey that starts with thinking, and that evolves into feeling. This change gives the wisdom to ‘become’ and eventually to ‘un-become’.

For this journey to progress, the rite of passage is what I refer to as the five oaths of the seeker. These oaths are the fundamental qualities that a seeker needs to develop and they are the qualities espoused by Patanjali under the step of *yama*. The primary elements of Patanjali’s Ashtanga Yoga, starting with *yama*, *niyama*, etc., can be better appreciated and actually realised experientially by a few moments of daily meditation under the Sahaj Marg system.

The word ‘yama’ has different connotations and meanings. In Sanskrit, it means ‘regulation’ or ‘self-discipline’. Lalaji described yama as follows¹:

“Giving up untrue feelings and untrue thought is yama. Yama means to give up. Yama means not to accept gifts, not to steal, not to tell lies etc. ... Yama is the giving up of unwanted things from the heart.”

In Hindu mythology, Yama is the God of death. How to reconcile this idea of death intertwined with the very first step of spirituality? The answer lies in the right understanding of life itself. Life begins and ends. It begins with conception and ends with the withdrawal of the soul.

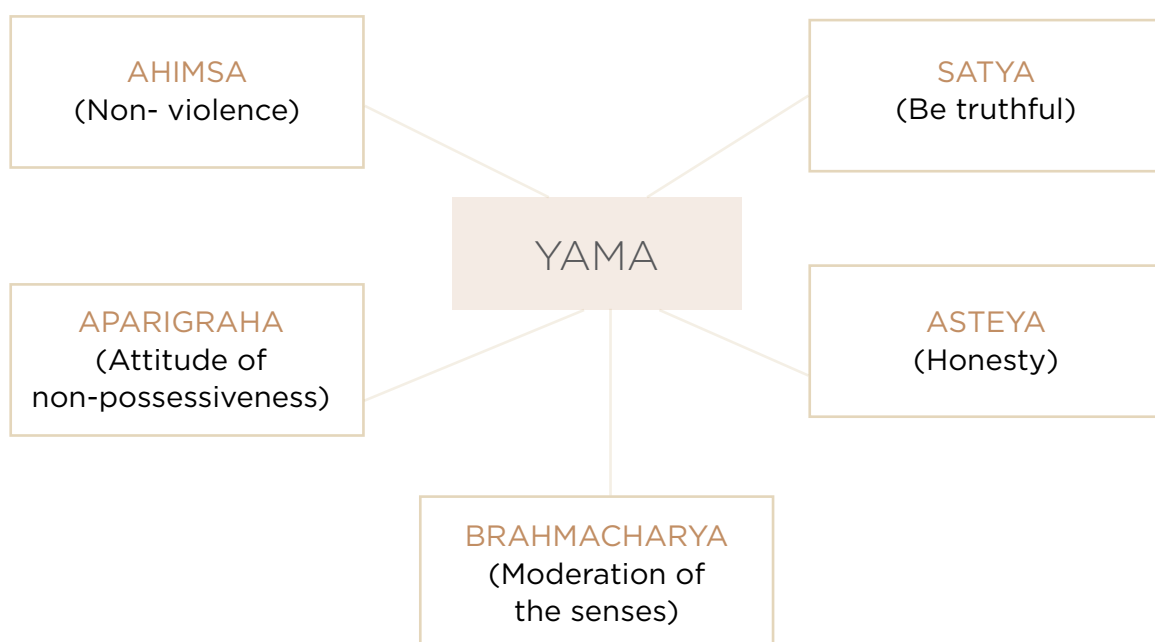
The real secret is to ‘die’ while still alive, consciously allowing ourselves to transcend ‘I’-ness in order to become universal. Meditation can also be called the process of conscious annihilation. But in those moments when we allow ourselves to jump into the depths of consciousness, many people are scared. Whenever this happens in meditation, they end up opening their eyes. They are unaware of the real goal and thus are scared.

¹ Complete Works of Ram Chandra of Fatehgarh, volume 2, 2013, Shri Ram Chandra Mission, India

Pujya Shri Babuji says, “Live as if you are going to die the next moment.” This constant reminder of Yama may sound too negative, but there is tremendous wisdom conveyed in this one sentence. This condition, known as that of ‘living dead’, is an effort to express the idea of transcending the ‘I’-ness with love. When this happens, we succeed in annihilating the ego, which was creating restriction and not letting life blossom.

With this transcendence of ego, we experience liveliness for the first time. What is liveliness? It means to live life with a heart; a life that is now connected to the eternal and the immortal; a life where there is neither bliss nor sorrow, neither pleasure nor pain. With such a transformation comes the wisdom to conduct life with self-discipline or yama. So even though in Sahaj Marg we start with the last three steps of Patanjali’s Ashtanga Yoga – *dharana* followed by *dhyana*, culminating in *samadhi* – the other steps are taken care of because of the newly-cultivated balanced tendencies of the mind.

Such discipline is possible in an individual with a well-developed *manomaya kosha* or mind sheath. It is not possible among *pashus*. One who is bound is a *pashu*: it may be that you are bound to your desires, your greed, or your lust. In fact bondage of any sort makes you a *pashu*, so bondage to the Guru makes you a *Guru-pashu*². Bondage of anything is not going to serve our purpose. You must exist as if you are in this world but not of this world. Exist like a lotus. Exist like a duty-bound personality. These five steps are like oaths or vows for living life bravely and not straying away from such a life.



² “Guru-pashu is one who considers his undeserving Guru as God, although the Guru himself does not consider himself so.” *Complete Works of Ram Chandra of Shahjahanpur*, volume 3, 2009, Shri Ram Chandra Mission, India

✿ *Ahimsa*: non-violence

The first step of yama begins with love. The fundamental divine law that governs life is “Love all”. If the idea of hurting someone remains in the heart, you have failed in the first step itself. Such persons intending to hurt others can easily become demons with more power. Love selflessly, unconditionally and joyfully. This is the essence of ahimsa.

It is a simple matter to understand that liking someone ultimately culminates in love. When we love all, where is the question of being violent or hurting others? When we love, we are ready to sacrifice our comforts, our possessions and ultimately ourselves. It is sad that under the spell of hatred, people destroy each other.

✿ *Satya*: be truthful

Be true to yourself. Be genuine and original. Say what you mean and mean what you say. There should never be a hidden agenda. No masks. No perversion to hide faults and no camouflages. Being truthful, but ensuring that the truth never hurts the heart of the other person, is only possible if ahimsa becomes a part of us. When we do not follow the heart, we allow our loved ones to get hurt. We follow wrong guidance and, thus, many suffer from an untruthful heart and the coercions that result from it. This is also a lack of authenticity. The inner environment is messed up and our pretension gives rise to a pattern of wrong habits. Hence, always be truthful and nurture the purity within.

✿ *Asteya*: honesty

When we have love in the heart and tread the path of truth, honesty will radiate in our existence. Our existence in thought, word and deed will be a manifestation of honesty. Then our very presence will give an impetus to the moral compass of all around us. Honesty is the result of a life led with love (*ahimsa*) and nurtured by truth (*satya*). We all know the famous statement by William Shakespeare: “This above all: to thine own self be true.”

✿ *Brahmacharya*: moderation of the senses

Brahmacharya has been narrowly understood to mean celibacy, whereas *brahmacharya* really means a state of being where we can bring about moderation across all our faculties. The term is composed of Brahm + charya.

The later, 'charya' means to dwell. So 'one who dwells in Brahm', is aptly called a *brahmacharya*. To act as if one is a *brahmacharya* is like putting the cart before the horse; it is artificial. We must become that.

When we dwell in that state, all our actions and thoughts will partake of the quality of Brahman. Such a state of superconsciousness is possible through Sahaj Marg practice, in which this moderation is achieved through the practice of regular meditation on [point A and cleaning of point B](#). For such a person, procreation is the fulfilment of duty. There is nothing wrong with procreation, as long as we remember not to become a slave to it.

Aparigraha: attitude of non-possessiveness towards worldly things

We must exist as if we are in the world but not of the world. Exist like a lotus. Exist with awareness of duties. When we perform our duties with devotion, then we develop non-attachment in a natural and spontaneous way. In Sahaj Marg practice, meditation on point A helps develop this virtue.

All these five qualities are dependent on the state of love. A loving, cheerful and contented heart will create the environment for the blossoming of life itself. A spiritual seeker who has fulfilled the five steps of yama will never be in any position to entertain his ego in any form. Be it exhibiting miracles, or showing off some possessions, he will never be able to covet or be greedy. Miracles may happen on their own without his efforts.

Becoming a vehicle of these five qualities prepares our heart for one purpose only: the purification of consciousness.

Our spiritual foundation is built on these five pillars. In fact, no spirituality is possible without these five steps. Becoming or imbibing these qualities prepares us for better and nobler experiences. Only when we want nothing from anybody, including God, do the doors open.

It is very much like a bank. When you are in dire need of money, banks generally will not help you, whereas when you have absolutely no need of money the bank will solicit your business. Likewise, when God finds a contented soul, then He wants to give you more. The heavenly gifts descend on those who renounce power itself. If we ask for it, then it is denied. Similar is the situation in nature. Powers descend automatically on one who says, "I do not need it."

For all my fellow travelers who feel daunted by the call of these vows, I would like to leave you with the lines of the poet H.W. Longfellow, who said,

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.



About Kamlesh D. Patel:

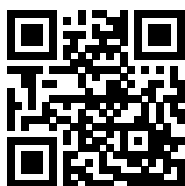


Known to many as Daaji, Kamlesh D. Patel is the fourth guide in the Heartfulness tradition of meditation. Embracing the many roles of a modern-day teacher, he has that rare capacity to dive deep into the center of his existence in the heart, while simultaneously having a scientific approach to original research in the field of meditation, spirituality and human evolution. He is a prolific speaker and writer, and you can read his latest writings at www.daaji.org.

About Heartfulness:

Heartfulness is an approach to the Raja Yoga system of meditation called Sahaj Marg, founded at the turn of the 20th century and formalized into an organization in 1945. More than seventy years later, Heartfulness has been adopted globally by groups across civil society, government departments, schools and colleges and corporates.

In 130 countries, supported by 7,000 certified volunteer trainers, over a million people are practising Heartfulness. This number continues to grow globally through hundreds of Heartfulness Centres worldwide.



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