

# YOGA FOR YAHOO'S

## Third Lecture - Niyama

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.

1. The subject of my third lecture is Niyama. Niyama? H'm!

The inadequacy of even the noblest attempts to translate these wretched Sanskrit words is now about to be delightfully demonstrated. The nearest I can get to the meaning of Niyama is 'virtue'! God help us all! This means virtue in the original etymological sense of the word – the quality of manhood; that is, to all intents and purposes, the quality of godhead.<sup>1</sup> But since we are translating Yama 'control,' we find that our two words have not at all the same relationship to each other that the words have in the original Sanskrit; for the prefix 'ni' in Sanskrit gives the meaning of turning everything upside down and backwards forwards, – as *you* would say, Hysteron Proteron<sup>2</sup> – at the same time producing the effect of transcendental sublimity. I find that I cannot even begin to think of a proper definition, although I know in my own mind perfectly well what the Hindus mean; if one soaks oneself in Oriental thought for a sufficient number of years, one gets a spiritual apprehension which it is quite impossible to express in terms applicable to the objects of intellectual apprehension; it is therefore much better to content ourselves with the words as they stand, and get down to brass tacks about the practical steps to be taken to master these preliminary exercises.

2. It will hardly have escaped the attentive listener that in my previous lectures I have combined the maximum of discourse with the minimum of information; that is all part of my training as a Cabinet Minister. But what does emerge tentatively from my mental fog is that

Yama, taking it by long and by large, is mostly negative in its effects. We are imposing inhibitions on the existing current of energy, just as one compresses a waterfall in turbines in order to control and direct the natural gravitational energy of the stream.

3. It might be as well, before altogether leaving the subject of Yama, to enumerate a few of the practical conclusions which follow from our premise that nothing which might weaken or destroy the beauty and harmony of the mind must be permitted. Social existence of any kind renders any serious Yoga absolutely out of the question; domestic life is completely incompatible with even elementary practices. No doubt many of you will say, 'That's all very well for him; let him speak for himself; as for me, I manage my home and my business so that everything runs on ball bearings.' Echo answers ...

4. Until you actually start the practice of Yoga, you cannot possibly imagine what constitutes a disturbance. You, most of you, think that you can sit perfectly still; you tell me what artists' models can do for over thirty-five minutes. They don't. You do not hear the ticking of the clock; perhaps you do not even know whether a typewriter is going in the room; for all I know, you could sleep peacefully through an air-raid. That has nothing to do with it. As soon as you start the practices you will find, if you are doing them properly, that you are hearing sounds which you never heard before in your life. You become hypersensitive. And as you have five external batteries bombarding you, you get little repose. You feel the air on your skin with about the same intensity as you would previously have felt a fist in your face.

5. To some extent, no doubt, this fact will be familiar to all of you. Probably most of you have been out at some time or other in what is grotesquely known as the silence of the night, and you will have become aware of infinitesimal movements of light in the darkness, of elusive sounds in the quiet. They will have soothed you and pleased you; it will never have occurred to you that these changes could each one be felt as a

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1 *Virtue*: an alteration of Middle English *vertu* < Anglo-French, Old French < Latin *virtūt-* (stem of *virtūs*) maleness, worth, virtue, equivalent to *vir*, man (see *virile*) + *-tūt-* abstract noun suffix.

2 "Proteron" means "advance". Depending on its Greek spelling, "hysteron" might be "post" or "lagging behind".

pang. But, even in the earliest months of Yoga, this is exactly what happens, and therefore it is best to be prepared by arranging, before you start at all, that your whole life will be permanently free from all the grosser causes of trouble. The practical problem of Yama is therefore, to a great extent, 'How shall I settle down to the work?' Then, having complied with the theoretically best conditions, you have to tackle each fresh problem as it arises in the best way you can.

6. We are now in a better position to consider the meaning of Niyama, or virtue. To most men the qualities which constitute Niyama are not apprehended at all by their self-consciousness. These are positive powers, but they are latent; their development is not merely measurable in terms of quantity and efficiency. As we rise from the coarse to the fine, from the gross to the subtle, we enter a new (and what appears on first sight to be an immeasurable) region. It is quite impossible to explain what I mean by this; if I could, you would know it already. How can one explain to a person who has never skated the nature of the pleasure of executing a difficult figure on the ice? He has in himself the whole apparatus ready for use; but experience, and experience only, can make him aware of the results of such use.

7. At the same time, in a general exposition of Yoga, it may be useful to give some idea of the functions on which those peaks that pierce the clouds of the limitations of our intellectual understanding are based.

I have found it very useful in all kinds of thinking to employ a sort of Abacus. The schematic representation of the universe given by astrology and the Tree of Life is extremely valuable, especially when reinforced and amplified by the Holy Qabalah. This Tree of Life is susceptible to infinite ramifications, and there is no need in this connection to explore its subtleties. We ought to be able to make a fairly satisfactory diagram for elementary purposes by taking as the basis of our illustration the solar system as conceived by the astrologers.

I do not know whether the average student is aware that in practice the significations of the

planets are based generally upon the philosophical conceptions of the Greek and Roman gods. Let us hope for the best, and go on!

8. The planet Saturn, which represents anatomy, is the skeleton: it is a rigid structure upon which the rest of the body is built. To what moral qualities does this correspond? The first point of virtue in a bone is its rigidity, its resistance to pressure. And so in Niyama we find that we need the qualities of absolute simplicity in our regimen; we need insensibility; we need endurance; we need patience. It is simply impossible for anyone who has not practised Yoga to understand what boredom means. I have known Yogis, men even holier than I, (*no! no!*) who, to escape from the intolerable tedium, would fly for refuge to a bottle party! It is a 'physiological' tedium which becomes the acutest agony. The tension becomes cramp; nothing else matters but to escape from the self-imposed constraint.

But every evil brings its own remedy. Another quality of Saturn is melancholy; Saturn represents the sorrow of the universe; it is the Trance of sorrow that has determined one to undertake the task of emancipation. This is the energising force of Law; it is the rigidity of the fact that everything is sorrow which moves one to the task, and keeps one on the Path.

9. The next planet is Jupiter. This planet is in many ways the opposite of Saturn; it represents expansion as Saturn represents contraction; it is the universal love, the selfless love whose object can be no less than the universe itself. This comes to reinforce the powers of Saturn when they agonise; success is not for self but for all; one might acquiesce in one's own failure, but one cannot be unworthy of the universe. Jupiter, too, represents the vital, creative, genial element of the cosmos. He has Ganymede and Hebe to his cupbearers. There is an immense and inaccessible joy in the Great Work; and it is the attainment of the trance, of even the intellectual foreshadowing of that trance, of joy, which reassures the Yogi that his work is worth while.

Jupiter digests experiences; Jupiter is the Lord of the Forces of Life; Jupiter takes common matter and transmutes it into celestial nourishment.

10. The next planet is Mars. Mars represents the muscular system; it is the lowest form of energy, and in Niyama it is to be taken quite literally as the virtue which enables one to contend with, and to conquer, the physical difficulties of the Work. The practical point is this: 'The little more and how much it is, the little less and what worlds away!' No matter how long you keep water at 99 degrees Centigrade under normal barometric pressure, it will not boil. I shall probably be accused of advertising some kind of motor spirit in talking about the little extra something that the others haven't got, but I assure you that I am not being paid for it.

Let us take the example of Pranayama, a subject with which I hope to deal in a subsequent lucubration.<sup>3</sup> Let us suppose that you are managing your breath so that your cycle, breathing in, holding, and breathing out, lasts exactly a minute. That is pretty good work for most people, but it may be or may not be good enough to get you going. No one can tell you until you have tried long enough (and no one can tell you how long 'long enough' may be) whether that is going to ring the bell. It may be that if you increase your sixty seconds to sixty-four the phenomena would begin immediately. That sounds all right but as you have nearly burst your lungs doing the sixty, you want this *added* energy to make the grade. That is only one example of the difficulty which arises with every practice.

Mars, moreover, is the flaming energy of passion, it is the male quality in its lowest sense; it is the courage which goes berserk, and I do not mind telling you that, in my own case at least, one of the inhibitions with which I had most frequently to contend was the fear that I was going mad. This was especially the case when those phenomena began to occur, which, recorded in cold blood, did seem like madness.

And the Niyama of Mars is the ruthless rage which jests at scars while dying of one's wounds.

' . . . the grim Lord of Colonsay  
Hath turned him on the ground,  
And laughed in death-pang that his blade  
The mortal thrust so well repaid'<sup>4</sup>

11. The next of the heavenly bodies is the centre of all, the Sun. The Sun is the heart of the system; he harmonises all, energises all, orders all. His is the courage and energy which is the source of all the other lesser forms of motion, and it is because of this that in himself he is calm. They are planets; he is a star. For him all planets come; around him they all move, to him they all tend. It is this centralisation of faculties, their control, their motivation, which is the Niyama of the Sun. He is not only the heart but the brain of the system; but he is not the 'thinking' brain, for in him all thought has been resolved into the beauty and harmony of ordered motion.

12. The next of the planets is Venus. In her, for the first time, we come into contact with a part of our nature which is none the less quintessential because it has hitherto been masked by our preoccupation with more active qualities. Venus resembles Jupiter, but on a lower scale, standing to him very much as Mars does to Saturn. She is close akin in nature to the Sun, and she may be considered an externalisation of his influence towards beauty and harmony. Venus is Isis, the Great Mother; Venus is Nature herself;

Venus is the sum of all possibilities.

The Niyama corresponding to Venus is one of the most important, and one of the most difficult of attainment. I said the sum of all possibilities, and I will ask you to go back in your minds to what I said before about the definition of the Great Work itself, the aim of the Yogi to consummate the marriage of all that he is with all that he is not, and ultimately to realise, insofar as the marriage is consummated, that what he is and what he is not are identical. Therefore we cannot pick and choose in our Yoga. It is written in the

<sup>3</sup> Lucubration: 1, Study; meditation. 2, A piece of writing, typically a pedantic or overelaborate one.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Walter Scott, "*The Lord of the Isles*", Canto VI, 32. (1815)

'Book of the Law', Chapter 1, verse 22, 'Let there be no difference made among you between any one thing and any other thing, for thereby there cometh hurt.'

Venus represents the ecstatic acceptance of all possible experience, and the transcendental assumption of all particular experience into the one experience.

Oh yes, by the way, don't forget this. In a lesser sense Venus represents tact. Many of the problems that confront the Yogi are impracticable to intellectual manipulation. They yield to graciousness.

13. Our next planet is Mercury, and the Niyama which correspond to him are as innumerable and various as his own qualities. Mercury is the Word, the Logos in the highest; he is the direct medium of connection between opposites; he is electricity, the very link of life, the Yogic process itself, its means, its end. Yet he is in himself indifferent to all things, as the electric current is indifferent to the meaning of the messages which may be transmitted by its means. The Niyama corresponding to Mercury in its highest forms may readily be divined from what I have already said, but in the technique of Yoga he represents the fineness of the method which is infinitely adaptable to all problems, and only so because he is supremely indifferent. He is the adroitness and ingenuity which helps us in our difficulties; he is the mechanical system, the symbolism which helps the human mind of the Yogi to take cognisance of what is coming.

It must here be remarked that because of his complete indifference to anything whatever (and that thought is – when you get far enough – only a primary point of wisdom) he is entirely unreliable. One of the most unfathomably dreadful dangers of the Path is that you must trust Mercury, and yet that if you trust him you are certain to be deceived. I can only explain this, if at all, by pointing out that, since all truth is relative, all truth is falsehood. In one sense Mercury is the great enemy; Mercury is mind, and it is the mind that we have set out to conquer.

14. The last of the seven sacred planets is the Moon. The Moon represents the totality of the

female part of us, the passive principle which is yet very different to that of Venus, for the Moon corresponds to the Sun much as Venus does to Mars. She is more purely passive than Venus, and although Venus is so universal the Moon is also universal in another sense. The Moon is the highest and the lowest; the Moon is the aspiration, the link of man and God; she is the supreme purity: Isis the Virgin, Isis the Virgin Mother; but she comes right down at the other end of the scale, to be a symbol of the senses themselves, the mere instrument of the registration of phenomena, incapable of discrimination, incapable of choice. The Niyama corresponding to her influence, the first of all, is that quality of aspiration, the positive purity which refuses union with anything less than the All. In Greek mythology Artemis, the Goddess of the Moon, is virgin; she yielded only to Pan. Here is one particular lesson: as the Yogi advances, magic powers (Siddhi<sup>5</sup> the teachers call them) are offered to the aspirant; if he accepts the least of these – or the greatest – he is lost.

15. At the other end of the scale of the Niyama of the Moon are the fantastic developments of sensibility which harass the Yogi. These are all help and encouragement; these are all intolerable hindrances; these are the greatest of the obstacles which confront the human being, trained as he is by centuries of evolution to receive his whole consciousness through the senses alone. And they hit us hardest because they interfere directly with the technique of our work; we are constantly gaining new powers, despite ourselves, and every time this happens we have to invent a new method for bringing their malice to naught. But, as before, the remedy is of the same stuff as the disease; it is the unswerving purity of aspiration that enables us to surmount all these difficulties. The Moon is the sheet-anchor of our work. It is the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel that enables us to overcome, at

5 Siddhi: 1, Complete understanding and enlightenment possessed by a siddha; 2. a paranormal power possessed by a siddha. A "siddha" is, of course, "one who has achieved spiritual realization and supernatural power."

all times and in all manners, as the need of the moment may be.

16. There are two other planets, not counted as among the sacred seven. I will not say that they were known to the ancients and deliberately concealed, though much in their writing suggests that this may be the case. I refer to the planet Herschel, or Uranus, and Neptune. Whatever may have been the knowledge of the ancients, it is at least certain that they left gaps in their system which were exactly filled by these two planets, and the newly discovered Pluto. They fill these gaps just as the newly discovered chemical elements discovered in the last fifty years fill the gaps in Mendeleeff's table of the Periodic Law.

17. Herschel represents the highest form of the True Will, and it seems natural and right that this should not rank with the seven sacred planets, because the True Will is the sphere which transcends them. 'Every man and every woman is a star.' Herschel defines the orbit of the star, your star. But Herschel is dynamic; Herschel is explosive; Herschel, astrologically speaking, does not move in an orbit; he has his own path. So the Niyama which corresponds to this planet is, first and last, the discovery of the True Will. This knowledge is secret and most sacred; each of you must incorporate for yourself the incidence and quality of Herschel. It is the most important of the tasks of the Yogi, because, until he has achieved it, he can have no idea who he is or where he is going.

18. Still more remote and tenuous is the influence of Neptune.

Here we have a Niyama of infinite delicacy, a spiritual intuition far, far removed from any human quality whatever. Here all is fantasy, and in this world are infinite pleasure, infinite perils. The True Niyama of Neptune is the imaginative faculty, the shadowing forth of the nature of the illimitable light.

He has another function. The Yogi who understands the influence of Neptune, and is attuned to Neptune, will have a sense of humour, which is the greatest safeguard for the Yogi. Neptune is, so to speak, in the front line; he has got to adapt himself to difficulties and

tribulations; and when the recruit asks 'What made that 'ole?' he has got to say, unsmiling, 'Mice.'<sup>6</sup>

Pluto is the utmost sentinel of all; of him it is not wise to speak.

... Having now given vent to this sybilline,<sup>7</sup> obscure and sinister utterance, it may well be asked by the greatly daring: Why is it not wise to speak of Pluto? The answer is profound. It is because nothing at all is known about him.

Anyhow it hardly matters; we have surely had enough of Niyama for one evening!

19. It is now proper to sum up briefly what we have learnt about Yama and Niyama. They are in a sense the moral, logical preliminaries of the technique of Yoga proper. They are the strategical as opposed to the tactical dispositions which must be made by the aspirant before he attempts anything more serious than the five finger exercises, as we may call them – the recruit's drill of postures, breathing exercises and concentration which the shallow confidently suppose to constitute this great science and art.

We have seen that it is presumptuous and impractical to lay down definite rules as to what we are to do. What does concern us is so to arrange matters that we are free to do anything that may become necessary or expedient, allowing for that development of supernormal powers which enables us to carry out our plans as they form in the mutable bioscope<sup>8</sup> of events.

If anyone comes to me for a rough and ready practical plan I say: Well, if you must stay in England, you may be able to bring it off with a bit of luck in an isolated cottage, remote from roads, if you have the services of an attendant already well trained to deal with the emergencies that are likely to arise. A good disciplinarian

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6 From a WW I cartoon by Bruce Bairnsfather. Two characters are contemplating a ragged hole in a ruined house. The younger one asks, 'What made that 'ole?' The older retorts, 'Mice.'

7 Sybilline (misspelled above): divinatory: resembling or characteristic of a prophet or prophecy.

8 Bioscope: an early form of motion-picture projector, used about 1900.

might carry on fairly well, at a pinch, in a suite in Claridge's.

But against this it may be urged that one has to reckon with unseen forces. The most impossible things begin to happen when once you get going. It is not really satisfactory to start serious Yoga unless you are in a country where the climate is reliable, and where the air is not polluted by the stench of civilisation. It is extremely important, above all things important, unless one is an exceedingly rich man, to find a country where the inhabitants understand the Yogin mode of life, where they are sympathetic with its practices, treat the aspirant with respect, and unobtrusively assist and protect him. In such circumstances, the exigency of Yama and Niyama is not so serious a stress.

There is, too, something beyond all these practical details which it is hard to emphasise without making just those mysterious assumptions which we have from the first resolved to avoid. All I can say is that I am very sorry, but this particular fact is going to hit you in the face before you have started very long, and I do not see why we should bother about the mysterious assumptions underlying the acceptance of the fact any more than in the case of what is after all equally mysterious and unfathomable: any object of any of the senses. The fact is this; that one acquires a feeling – a quite irrational feeling – that a given place or a given method is right or wrong for its purposes. The intimation is as assured as that of the swordsman when he picks up an untried weapon; either it comes up sweet to the hand, or it does not. You cannot explain it, and you cannot argue it away.

21. I have treated Yama and Niyama at great length because their importance has been greatly underrated, and their nature completely misunderstood. They are definitely magical practices, with hardly a tinge of mystical flavour. The advantage to us here is that we can very usefully exercise and develop ourselves in this way in this country where the technique of Yoga is for all practical purposes impossible. Incidentally, one's real country – that is, the

conditions in which one happens to be born – is the only one in which Yama and Niyama can be practised. You cannot dodge your Karma. You have got to earn the right to devote yourself to Yoga proper by arranging for that devotion to be a necessary stage in the fulfilment of your True Will. In Hindustan one is not allowed to become 'Sanyasi' – a recluse – until one has fulfilled one's duty to one's own environment – rendered to Caesar the things which are Caesar's before rendering to God the things which are God's.

Woe to that seven months' abortion who thinks to take advantage of the accidents of birth, and, mocking the call of duty, sneaks off to stare at a blank wall in China! Yama and Niyama are only the more critical stages of Yoga because they cannot be translated in terms of a schoolboy curriculum. Nor can schoolboy tricks adequately excuse the aspirant from the duties of manhood. Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.

### **Rejoice, true men, that this is thus!**

For this at least may be said, that there are results to be obtained in this way which will not only fit the aspirant for the actual battle, but will introduce him to classes of hitherto unguessed phenomena whose impact will prepare his mind for that terrific shock of its own complete overthrow which marks the first critical result of the practices of Yoga.

Love is the law, love under will.