



Niyamas â?? Santosha (Contentment)

Description

Introduction



Context

- Sutra 2.42, second *niyama*

Translations

- By contentment, supreme joy is gained. â?? Sri Swami Satchidananda
- The result of contentment is total happiness. â?? T.K.V. Desikachar
- Unexcelled happiness comes from the practice of contentment. â?? Swami Satyananda Saraswati
- When at peace and content with oneself and others (*Santosha*), supreme joy is celebrated. â?? Nischala Joy Devi
- An attitude of contentment (*santosha*) gives rise to unexcelled happiness, mental comfort, joy, and satisfaction. â?? AshtangaYoga.info
- As the result of contentment, one gains supreme happiness. â?? Swami Prabhavananda (YogaSutraStudy.info)

Heart of the Teaching

- Being at peace in the moment; having an attitude of contentment
- Accepting reality

- While *santosha* is said to lead to happiness, the contentment being described is not the same as being happy or liking what is happening
- *Santosha* does not advocate submissiveness or apathy; rather, it suggests choosing calmness and clarity of mind (from which right action stems)

Making it Relevant



- When we are not experiencing contentment, weâ€™re likely resisting whatâ€™s happening in some way. This usually means weâ€™re agitated, worried, frustrated, angry or depressed.
- So, with the practice of contentment, weâ€™re endeavoring to spend less time in agitation and more time aware of whatâ€™s really happening â€“ another way of bringing us back to the present moment without judgment.

See Also

- [Present Moment Awareness](#)
- [Self-Acceptance](#)
- [Surrender / Allowing / Accepting / Creating Space](#)

More Talking Points

- â€œ*Santosha* is the choice to end our war with reality.â€• (Rolf Gates, *Meditations from the Mat* 2002 p 90)
- Contentment does not necessarily mean we are happy or like what is happening.
- It is not the same as complacency, submissiveness or apathy. And it does not mean that by being content with the present moment that we lose motivation to take action when action is needed. Rather, it is a choice to accept reality and choose clarity of mind. From this state of contentment comes right action.

MAKES POOR MEN RICH

Contentment makes poor men rich. Discontentment makes rich men poor. â€“ Benjamin Franklin

PRACTICING IN DIFFICULT MOMENTS

We can easily practice *santosha* in the beautiful moments and joyous experiences of our lives. But Patanjali asks us to be equally willing to embrace the difficult moments. â€“ Judith Lasater

PRACTICING IN BEAUTIFUL MOMENTS

Personally, I think that practicing contentment in the beautiful moments is not a bad place to start. I've spent countless high points in my life fretting over this aspect or that aspect of the moment: Will it last? Is it real? Am I worthy? Blah, blah, blah. It has been an ongoing struggle for me to be content in the beautiful moments, to be still in success. I am much better at setbacks. Rolf Gates

EXPERIENCING CONTENTMENT AMIDST CONSTANT CHANGE

True inner happiness rests upon feeling content with who we are right now. Like the rest of the world, we are changing from moment to moment. Possessions flow in and out of our lives, people around us come and go, our opinions and even what we think is true changes over time. Our outer form is in flux around a deeper and permanent light of awareness (*purusa*). Complete satisfaction and contentment can be experienced when our heart-mind field of consciousness (*citta*) rests quietly in this awareness. Nicolai Bachman

WHY WEALTHY PEOPLE CAN SOMETIMES BE SO UTTERLY UNHAPPY

The seeds for being happy and the seeds for being rich are different seeds—and that explains why wealthy people can sometimes be so utterly unhappy. The karmic seed that's planted by training ourselves to be satisfied with any level of material comfort is different. This seed ripens as pure contentment, and it's worth a huge amount of wealth seeds. A person who is contented with simplicity has surpassed wealth itself. Geshe Michael Roach

Practices



- During *asana* and meditation, practice [mindfulness](#) and choosing contentment.
- Practice mindfulness when having unexpected idle time, such as while waiting in line.
- Practice [gratitude](#).

STOP CONFORMING TO WHAT WE THINK OTHERS EXPECT OF US

How we look in front of others can be a source of dissatisfaction. For example, if we attend a yoga lecture, we may feel we have to sit on the floor, even though doing so is uncomfortable for us, because others are sitting on the floor. Why not just sit in a chair? Even for meditation, it is better to be relaxed and upright in a chair than tense, in pain, and slouched sitting on the floor. When we conform to what we think others expect of us in order to save face and be accepted by others, we are not content with ourselves. Nicolai Bachman

RECONSIDERING WHAT CONSTITUTES PROGRESS IN ASANA



Nothing creates greater dissatisfaction in asana practice than the thought that your practice should be something other than it is. — Charlotte Bell

THOSE WHO ARE INFLEXIBLE CAN BE EXPERTS IN ASANA

Sometimes our progress performing the physical postures, called *asana* is falsely judged by our level of flexibility. If people can perform all of the “difficult” postures, are they really good at *asana*? If so, then a ballet dancer or gymnast could walk into a class and be judged the most advanced student. Obviously, this thinking is misperception (*viparyaya*). In fact, even those who are inflexible can be experts in *asana* if they are exerting sincere effort and understand their bodies and their limitations. — Nicolai Bachman

MINDFULNESS AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPING CONTENTMENT

Contentment is deep acceptance of what is. [Mindfulness practice](#), being present with and accepting each moment’s unfolding phenomena, helps us to develop contentment on a fundamental level. As we practice mindfulness, we discover a natural sense of equanimity toward whatever is occurring in each moment. What arises is not negotiable; how we choose to respond to it is. In each moment, we have the opportunity to choose whether to meet our circumstances with acceptance or resistance. This choice sows the seed of contentment or of suffering. — Charlotte Bell

Personal Story

It can help to make a teaching more real and memorable if it’s accompanied by a personal story. We invite you to share your own experiences with your students.

To help remind you of your own experiences, here’s a story one teacher shared when teaching a class with a *santosh* theme. This was at a studio where philosophy was discussed before movement so there was more time for a story than in some *asana* classes.

This weekend, I volunteered at a homeless shelter. My job, along with another volunteer, was to transport the women to an overflow facility and stay the night with them. Even though it’s an overnight commitment, I’ve always had a wonderful experience. The women tend to be amazing, grateful and kind. The shelter screens for extreme mental illness or drugs and so the “work” is usually the simple, heart-warming activity of making people feel cared for and respected.

But this time, there was a woman who was having a very hard time. We all sleep in one room. In the middle of the night, this woman stood up and began talking and yelling (in another language) to the air. I stayed relaxed and tried to calm her, but she didn’t seem to see me. I tried to walk her out of the room and offered anything I could think of to bring her comfort, feeling desperate to shelter the other women from disturbance. She didn’t respond in any way to my efforts. (The other volunteer was an elderly woman who was not able to help.) Eventually, after a very long time, the agitated woman settled and sat down on her mat.

After I got back to my mat, I started to feel agitated myself. I realized how little sleep I would now get, and I felt anxious about how it would affect me the following day. I began to worry about the woman not



going back to sleep. What if she got up again? What would I do? And I worried that some of the other women were getting so annoyed that they might begin to create their own disturbance in response. My mind was racing. And you know how everything can feel so desperate in the middle of the night? I was starting to feel overwhelmed.

But then I remembered that I had been studying *santosha* recently. I wondered what I could possibly be content with right now. Through the grace of presence, I realized that as of that moment, everything was fine. The woman was quiet. There was nothing I needed to be doing. As I re-focused my mind on these truths, I became aware of the sensations in my side body as it melted into the mat. The feeling was actually heavenly! I was so tired, and it felt so incredibly good to sink into the mat. The warm blanket up around my neck was soft and I realized what a sense of relief I was feeling. My exhale was sweet and relaxing. The next thing I knew, I awoke in the morning, feeling calm and relief.

Readings

STILLNESS, FAITH, OPEN HEART & MIND

Santosha is the practice of being still with faith, with an open heart and an open mind. â?? Rolf Gates

WHAT WE WANT VS UNDERSTANDING WHO WE REALLY ARE

This feeling of contentment is not the same as what we feel when we have everything we ever wanted in life in terms of possessions, a partner, and an ideal job. Those things can all change. True *santosha* comes from the understanding that who we really are at the core is none other than that light of awareness that all beings share. â?? Nicolai Bachman

ACCEPTING WHAT HAPPENS

Often, we hope for a particular result to ensue from our actions, and we are just as often disappointed. But there is no need to despairâ??rather, we should accept what has happened. That is the real meaning of *santosha*: to accept what happens. A commentary on the Yoga Sutra says, â??Contentment counts for more than all sixteen heavens together.â?• â?? T. K. V. Desikachar

THE FRAGRANCE OF PRESENT MOMENT AWARENESS

Santosha is the fragrance of present moment awareness. â?? Deepak Chopra & David Simon

NEITHER LIKING NOR DISLIKING

Here we should understand the difference between contentment and satisfaction. Contentment means just to be as we are without going to outside things for our happiness. If something comes, we let it come. If not, it doesnâ??t matter. Contentment means neither to like nor dislike. â?? Sri Swami Satchidananda



DISSATISFACTION IS ONE OF THE GREAT VEILS OF AVIDYA

Contentment is one of the fixed rules for a spiritual aspirant who is very serious about the higher aspect of yoga and realization. It is impossible for one who is dissatisfied with oneself or with anything else in life to realize the higher consciousness. Dissatisfaction is one of the great veils of avidya and therefore it is to be removed, because it causes many undesirable complexes and brings about a state of psychic illness, and if the mind is ill, no sadhana is possible! The happiness that comes from [*santosha*] is unparalleled. As a result, one can go very deep in meditation. In the absence of contentment, different mental complexes come into play and such a person is unfit for meditation. — Swami Satyananda Saraswati

AN AGREEMENT WITH OUR DIVINE SELF

Santosha is an agreement of faith that we make with our Divine Self. This faith fastens us to the peace that abides in our hearts, no matter what the fates bring. By this affirmation we firmly identify with our inner essence rather than with external objects. Our identification then travels with gratitude, appreciating how much we have rather than how much we want. With this attitude, all things that come and go do not have the opportunity to override our joy. — Nischala Joy Devi

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