



Niyamas- Saucha (Cleanliness / Clarity)

Description

Introduction



Context

- Sutras 2.40 and 2.41, first *niyama*

Heart of Teaching

- This teaching is focused on cleanliness / purity of body and mind to allow Self-Realization.
- It has both external and internal practices. External *saucha* refers to keeping the body clean and healthy. Internal cleanliness refers to healthy organs and a clear mind.

Translations + Modern Commentary

Translations Sutra 2.40

- When cleanliness is developed it reveals what needs to be constantly maintained and what is eternally clean. What decays is the external. What does not is deep within us. â?? T.K.V. Desikachar, The Heart of Yoga 1995 p 178
- By purification arises disgust for oneâ??s own body and for contact with other bodies. â?? Sri Swami Satchidananda

- From cleanliness there comes indifference towards body and non-attachment to others. â?? Swami Satyananda Saraswati
- Through simplicity and continual refinement (*Saucha*), the body, thoughts, and emotions become clear reflections of the Self within. â?? Nischala Joy Devi
- Purity (*shaucha*) results in the abandonment of physicality and the cessation of physical contact with external things. â?? AshtangaYoga.info
- As the result of purity, there arises indifference toward the body and disgust for physical intercourse with others. â?? Swami Prabhavananda (YogaSutraStudy.info)

Translations: Sutra 2.41

- Moreover, one gains purity of sattva, cheerfulness of mind, one-pointedness, mastery over the senses, and fitness for Self-realization. â?? Sri Swami Satchidananda
- In addition, one becomes able to reflect on the very deep nature of our individual selves, including the source of perception, without being distracted by the senses and with freedom from misapprehension accumulated from the past. â?? T.K.V. Desikachar
- By the practice of mental purity, one acquires fitness for cheerfulness, one-pointedness, sense control and vision of the self. â?? Swami Satyananda Saraswati
- *Saucha* reveals our joyful nature, and the yearning for knowing the Self blossoms. â?? Nischala Joy Devi
- Also, the capacity for clarity, cleanliness, cheerfulness and intentness, as well as mastery over the senses, ultimately give rise to self-realization. â?? AshtangaYoga.info
- Moreover, one achieves purification of the heart, cheerfulness of mind, the power of concentration, control of the passions and fitness for vision of the Atman. â?? Swami Prabhavananda (YogaSutraStudy.info)

Modern Commentary

Iâ??m not so sure most people would find the listed benefits palatable (e.g. â??Aversion to oneâ??s own body and avoidance of contact with others comes from bodily purification.â??)â??! In his book *Enlightenment: The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, the author comments on this view of Sutra 2.40. While he considers translations such as the above to be valid in a literal sense, and appropriate for those who choose to practice renunciationâ??! he explains *saucha* as a practice that protects us not from simple contact with othersâ?? bodies but from â??their diseases as well as their violence of thoughts, words and actions.â??• The natural by-product of *saucha*, he says is physical security and invincibility. Practicing *saucha* creates a field of purity in our body-mind that is able to absorb the impurities visited upon it without being contaminated by them. â?? Charlotte Bell

Making it Relevant

At first blush, *saucha* may seem fairly irrelevant in todayâ??s world. When students rarely have to worry about bugs in their practice space and have ample access to soap and hot water showers, how might cleanliness or purity be seen as useful in modern life?



A deeper teaching of *saucha* involves cleanliness of mind, body and soul that allows the true Self to gleam with positive energy. Some common reminders are to:

- Clear the mind.
- Release tension.
- Allow thoughts to pass.

The goal behind these cues is to de-clutter body and mind in an effort to let the spirit abound in illumination.

SIMPLICITY

Cultivating simplicity of mind and emotions can be a refreshing change from the complicated world we live in. â?? Nischala Joy Devi

CLEANLINESS & ORDER

In addition to the obvious advantages, there are a number of side benefits to eating unadulterated food, breathing clean air, having the ability to clean ourselves within and without and residing in clean homes and neighborhoods. Cleanliness and order lift our self-esteem, reinforce our knowledge that we are worthy of good experiences, and improve our personalities so we can experience balanced self-awareness. When we feel pure and clean, we can be clear about our intentions, unencumbered by gross and subtle imbalances. â?? Swami Shraddhananda

CLEANSE ENERGY, TOO

Aadil Palkhivala writes in the YJ article *Teaching the Niyamas in Asana Class* that *saucha* also refers to being mindful of energy. For instance, he notes that chants such as om at the beginning and ending of class â??create a separation between the outward focus of the normal day and the inward focus of the yoga practiceâ?• and â??seal the energy of the practice.â?•

IMPERMANENCE & ATTACHMENTS

Keeping the body clean can remind us of its [impermanence](#), since it is always changing, which in turn can make us realize what does not change and requires no maintenance (the light within). All the stuff we spend time cleaning can also reveal what we are attached to. â?? Nicolai Bachman

More Talking Points

In Class

Become aware of surroundings through such actions as:



- Keep props, water bottles, etc that are next to the mat neat so the teacher doesn't trip on them.
- Avoid walking on others' mats.
- Put away props in an orderly manner, with blanket edges aligned, so that no one else will have to arrange them.

More

- Internal cleanliness: healthy organs
- Keeping a clear mind: free of haughtiness, jealousy, or being unduly touchy. (Srivatsa Ramaswami)
- *Saucha* as a way to get to a state of mind that allows us to take right action.
- *Saucha* as the governing principle of the *niyamas*, threading the observances together.
- *Saucha* as pure intention when connecting with others.
- Fundamentally we are, at the core, natural and organic.
- *Saucha* as a tool for becoming aware of muck, a dirty film clogging pores and minds.
- *Saucha* as a tool to meet circumstances face-to-face with an open mind and open heart; keeping body and mind clean and clear to aid in making positive, effective choices.
- By honoring the body and mind, we help to keep at bay such troubles as negativity, selfishness and blind action while welcoming positivity, selflessness, and grounded, balanced intention.

NOTICING A FEELING OF BEING UNCLEAN ON THE INSIDE

Sometimes a feeling that we are unclean on the inside, often as the result of a past, painful experience, can manifest as obsessive cleaning on the outside. This would be an instance of *dvesa-klesa* affecting our actions. — Nicolai Bachman

A SERENE STATE OF MIND

Mental purity and physical simplicity lead to a serene state of mind, no longer enslaved by excesses of food or sex. When the water of a lake is perfectly still, only then can we see the full moon reflected in it: ultimate reality, emptiness. — Geshe Michael Roach

RITUAL

Many cultures have ritualistic bathing practices! Early-morning immersions in a holy river, often performed while repeating prayers, purify not only the body but the mind and emotions as well, so the light in the heart can be experienced. Baptism purifies the body so the blessed spirit within can shine. On a less esoteric level, the enrichment gained by soaking in a natural hot spring, sauna or steam bath continues to delight many throughout the ages. — Nischala Joy Devi

On the Mat



Considerations

- Verbal cues to help students clear the mind, release tension, and allow thoughts to pass
- Notice if pace has become uncomfortable or creates distress such as a short, quick breath.
- Become aware of sensations in the body and associated thoughts and emotions that, when unexamined, may become unconscious attitudes and behaviors.

Guided Visualization

Relax in *savasana* and use a guided visualization such as the following to invite the feelings and experience of *saucha*.

Imagine a beautiful, sparkling clean, white marble lined room, adorned with mirrors and glass.

The room is filled with natural light and warmth from huge floor-to-ceiling windows.

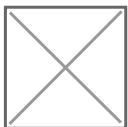
Your back body is drawing in energy from the ground and is fully supported.

Your body is melting like butter on a hot plate, releasing any areas of stress, letting go of any thought beyond observation.

Your body is like a feather â?? airy and pure.

The cleanliness of your surroundings reflects your purity and inner peace as you rest.

Off the Mat



We can endeavor to make choices that result in clarity of mind and bodyâ??not because we â??shouldâ?• but because we enjoy the experience of de-cluttering that allows our higher self to shine. We make such choices because we come to realize that we feel better than how we feel after we indulge short-term impulses for immediate gratification. A pure approach to living allows spontaneous calm and rest in the midst of turmoil, allowing natural and organic growth in all areas of life.

Areas of consideration can include eating, sleeping, exercise and internal hygiene (through meditation and *pranayama*, for example).

TREAT OTHERS AS MYSELF



If I am acting from selfishness, my intention does not have its origin in purity; when I act from compassion, then my actions are pure, even if just for that moment. When I treat others as myself, I am practicing *saucha* and at those times my relationships are as pure and connected as they can ever be. â?? Judith Lasater

NOTING WHAT ALLOWS A SENSE OF PURITY & SIMPLICITY

When watching a scary movie or reading a disturbing book, notice how your thoughts and emotions mimic that mood. It could be an immediate response, or it could be a delayed one in a totally different situationâ?|. When you walk on a pristine beach, or in a forest, does the simplicity of nature afford the mind and emotions a joyful feeling? Does it seem like all the worries you brought with you surrender to the peaceful surroundings? Write down which foods, clothes, and places allow you to feel that sense of purity, simplicity, and refinement. â?? Nischala Joy Devi

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 shared by teacher Regan Franklin, Yoga Teacher Central member and contributing author from Washington DC.

When it comes to decision-making, I am a hot mess: decision-making has always been tough for me. Whether it is about career choices or what to do about dinner, I have struggled to settle on one choice. I have learned to incorporate *saucha* into my decision-making process. It has allowed me to be more authoritative with myself and to go forth with conviction. I've often heard people say that they accomplished one thing or another in a "moment of clarity." It is precisely that moment that spontaneous moment that *saucha* has inspired me to capture and make my own. Being able to

make a decision is a skill that brings me back to myself in each instance. Even if my choices are met with challenges, I am content knowing that I came to a conclusion void of any distraction of body and mind in the moment the decision was made.

Tuning in and becoming aware of the sensations and attitudes that I had while weighing my option helped me to hone in on and harness the feeling that will lead to making a determination. Keeping my mind and body healthy provides me with the tools needed to focus on the task at hand with certainty. I also like to remind myself that everything happens for a reason and so even if my decision does not turn out the way I had hoped, I am given the opportunity to practice *ahimsa* (non-harming) with myself.

â?? Regan Franklin

Readings



INTERNAL CLEANLINESS



Internal cleanliness generally refers to keeping the mind free of haughtiness, jealousy, or being unduly touchy. â?? Srivatsa Ramaswami

PURIFICATION OF ALL LAYERS

Our outer, physical shell is like a temple that temporarily houses [our pure inner light of awareness, purusha]. Keeping our temple clean makes it possible to connect with the divine radiance within. The process of yoga is a gradual purification of all layers of our individual self. The physical body is purified through *tapas* and *asana*, the breath through *pranayama*, the heart-mind from all eight limbs of yoga. â?? Nicolai Bachman

EXTERNAL & INTERNAL PRACTICES

I think of *saucha* as the feng shui aspect of the Yoga Sutras, acknowledging the effect of our environment â?? both mental and physical â?? on the state of our mindsâ?. If we are to find lasting happiness, we must not only clean up our rooms but clean up our thoughts as well. Fortunately, that is precisely what the practice of yoga is all about. â?? Rolf Gates

MENTAL & SPIRITUAL ASPECTS

The cultivation of purity in the mind comes through positive thinking, including healthy choices about what we mentally consume, like the television shows we watch, the music we listen to and the company we keep. Spiritually, we engage in purity through yoga practice, or through prayer, meditation, inspirational readings, and community. â?? Robert Butera, Ph.D.

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