Good Conduct
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What right-minded soul does not seek to be a good parent, a good spouse, a good citizen, a good neighbor, indeed, a good human being? Here are a few keys.

Among serious aspirants on the path, and even those interested only in a happy and wholesome life, few would deny that right living is fundamental to contentment. Though life is meant to be lived joyously, our personal experience may be less rewarding. Seeking the missing joy leads us toward right conduct.

What Is the Meaning of Good Conduct?

Good conduct is right thought, right speech and right action. It is virtuous deeds in harmony with divine law, reflecting the soul's innate purity. As a staff is used to climb a mountain, so must virtue be used in life. Aum.

Good conduct, sadachara, determines our behavior in day-to-day life. We should be uplifting to our fellow man, not critical or injurious. We should be loving and kind, not hateful or mean. We should express the soul's beautiful qualities of self-control, modesty and honesty. We should be a good example to others and a joy to be around, not a person to be avoided. Good conduct is the sum of spiritual living and comes through keeping good company. When heart and mind are freed of baseness, when desires have been tempered and excesses avoided, dharma is known and followed, and good conduct naturally arises. The Hindu fosters humility and shuns arrogance, seeks to assist, never to hinder, finds good in others and forgets their faults. There is no other way to be called a true devotee, but to conduct ourself properly within ourself and among our fellow men. The Vedas say, "Let there be no neglect of Truth. Let there be no neglect of dharma. Let there be no neglect of welfare. Let there be no neglect of prosperity. Let there be no neglect of study and teaching. Let there be no neglect of the duties to the Gods and the

ancestors." Aum.

What Are Good Conduct's Four Keys?

Purity, devotion, humility and charity are the four keys to good conduct. Of these, purity is the cardinal virtue. We cultivate purity by thinking, speaking and doing only that which is conceived in compassion for all. Aum.

Purity is the pristine and natural state of the soul. We cultivate purity by refraining from anger and retaliation, by maintaining a clean and healthy body, and by guarding our virginity until marriage. We cultivate purity by seeking good company and by living a disciplined life. Devotion is love of God, Gods and guru, and dedication to family and friends. We cultivate devotion through being loyal and trustworthy. We cultivate devotion through worship and selfless service. Humility is mildness, modesty, reverence and unpretentiousness. We cultivate humility by taking the experiences of life in understanding and not in reaction, and by seeing God everywhere. We cultivate humility through showing patience with circumstances and forbearance with people. Charity is selfless concern and caring for our fellow man. It is generous giving without thought of reward, always sharing and never hoarding. We cultivate charity through giving to the hungry, the sick, the homeless, the elderly and the unfortunate. The Vedas explain, "As to a mountain that's enflamed, deer and birds do not resort-so, with knowers of God, sins find no shelter." Aum.

From Whom Is Good Conduct Learned?

The first teacher in matters of good conduct is our conscience. To know what is right and what is wrong we can also turn to God, to our satguru and swamis, to scripture and to our elders, family and trusted friends. Aum.

Divine laws cannot be avoided. They do not rule us from above but are wrought into our very nature. Even death cannot efface the karma created by evil deeds. Good conduct alone can resolve woeful karmas. Therefore, it is essential that we learn and adhere to good conduct. Good people are the best teachers of good

conduct, and should be sought out and heeded when we need help or advice. Talk with them, the wise ones, and in good judgment be guided accordingly. Ethical scriptures should be read and studied regularly and their wisdom followed. The loud voice of our soul, ever heard within our conscience, is a worthy guide. When we grasp the subtle mechanism of karma, we wisely follow the good path. Good conduct, or sadachara, for the Hindu is summarized in five obligatory duties, called pancha nitya karmas: virtuous living, dharma; worship, upasana; holy days, utsava; pilgrimage, tirthayatra; and sacraments, samskaras. The Vedas offer this guidance, "If you have doubt concerning conduct, follow the example of high souls who are competent to judge, devout, not led by others, not harsh, but lovers of virtue." Aum.

What Are the Ten Classical Restraints?

Hinduism's ethical restraints are contained in ten simple precepts called yamas. They define the codes of conduct by which we harness our instinctive forces and cultivate the innate, pristine qualities of our soul. Aum.

The yamas and niyamas are scriptural injunctions for all aspects of thought and behavior. They are advice and simple guidelines, not commandments. The ten yamas, defining the ideals of charya, are: 1) ahimsa, "noninjury," do not harm others by thought, word or deed; 2) satya, "truthfulness," refrain from lying and betraying promises; 3) asteya, "nonstealing," neither steal nor covet nor enter into debt; 4) brahmacharya, "divine conduct," control lust by remaining celibate when single, leading to faithfulness in marriage; 5) kshama, "patience," restrain intolerance with people and impatience with circumstances; 6) dhriti, "steadfastness," overcome nonperseverance, fear, indecision and changeableness; 7) daya, "compassion," conquer callous, cruel and insensitive feelings toward all beings; 8) arjava, "honesty," renounce deception and wrongdoing; 9) mitahara, "moderate appetite," neither eat too much, nor consume meat, fish, fowl or eggs; 10) shaucha, "purity," avoid impurity in body, mind and speech. The Vedas proclaim, "To them belongs yon stainless Brahma world in whom there is no crookedness and falsehood, nor trickery." Aum.

What Are the Ten Classical Observances?

Hinduism's religious tenets are contained in ten terse precepts called niyamas. They summarize the essential practices that we observe and the soulful virtues

and qualities we strive daily to perfect. Aum.

Good conduct is a combination of avoiding unethical behavior and performing virtuous, spiritualizing acts. The accumulated wisdom of thousands of years of Hindu culture has evolved ten niyamas, or religious observances. These precepts defining the ideals of kriya are: 1) hri, "remorse," be modest and show shame for misdeeds; 2) santosha, "contentment," seek joy and serenity in life; 3) dana, "giving," tithe and give creatively without thought of reward; 4) astikya, "faith," believe firmly in God, Gods, guru and the path to enlightenment; 5) Ishvarapujana, "worship," cultivate devotion through daily puja and meditation; 6) siddhanta shravana, "scriptural listening," study the teachings and listen to the wise of one's lineage; 7) mati, "cognition," develop a spiritual will and intellect with a guru's guidance; 8) vrata, "sacred vows," fulfill religious vows, rules and observances faithfully; 9) japa, "recitation," chant holy mantras daily; 10) tapas, "austerity," perform sadhana, penance, tapas and sacrifice. The Vedas state, "They indeed possess that Brahma world who possess austerity and chastity, and in whom the truth is established." Aum.