Facing Life's Tests With Wisdom
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Living by the ancient guidance of the yamas and niyamas can help us brave life's challenges

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When we are children, we run freely, because we have no great subconscious burdens to carry. Very little has happened to us. Of course, our parents and religious institutions try to prepare us for life'stests. But because the conscious mind of a child doesn't know any better, it generally does not accept the preparation without experience, and life begins the waking up to the material world, creating situations about us magnificent opportunities for failing these tests. If we do not fail, we know that we have at some prior time learned the lesson inherent in the experience. Experience gives us a bit of wisdom when we really face ourselves and discover the meaning of failure and success. Failureis just education. But you shouldn't fail once you know the law.

There have been many systems and principles of ethicsand moralityestablished by various world teachers down through the ages. All of these have had only one common goal to provide for man living on the planet Earth a guidepost for his

thought and action so that his consciousness, his awareness, may evolve to the realization of life's highest goals and purposes. The ancient yoga systems provided a few simple yamasand niyamasfor religiousobservance, defining how all people should live. The yamas, orrestraints, provide a basic system of discipline for the instinctive mind. The niyamas, or positive observances, are the affirming, life-giving actions and disciplines.

Life offers you an opportunity. As the Western theologian speaks of sins of omission as well as sins of commission, so we find that life offers us an opportunity to break the law as indicated by the yamas, as well as to omit the observances of the niyamas. If we take the opportunity to live out of tune with Hindu dharma, reaction is built in the subconscious mind. This reaction stays with us and recreates the physical and astral body accordingly.

Have you ever known a friend who reacted terribly to an experiencein life and as a result became so changed mentally and physically that you hardly recognized him? Our external conscious mind has a habit of not being able to take the meaning out of life's most evident lessons.

The basic laws of life are so simple that many people don't heed them. Why? Generally because the opportunities afforded us to failthese tests are so plentiful that we generate very good reasons for not paying attention to our lessons. Shall we say it is normal to fail some of these tests? Yes, isn't this like getting a failing grade on a report card in school, not passing some of the tests and having to take a course over

again? We must learn from our experiences or find ourselves repeating them again and again.

It is our teaching not to react to life'sexperiences, but to understandthem and in the understanding to free ourselves from the impact of these experiences, realizing the Self within. The true Self is only realized when you gain a subconscious control over your mind by ceasing to react to your experiences so that you can concentrate your mind fully, experience first meditation and contemplation, then samadhi, or Self Realization. First we must face oursubconscious.

There are many amusing ways in which people go about facing themselves. Some sit down to think things over, turning out the lightof understanding. They let their minds wander, accomplishing nothing. Let me suggest to you a better way.

In facing ourselves let us relate our actions, our thoughts and our feelings to the yamasand theniyamas, the wise restraints and observances of Hindudharma. In aligning ourselves with these universal laws, we can soon see how clear or muddy is our own subconscious. Fulfilling the restraints first allows us to take the next step on the spiritual path, which is the fulfillment of the observances. As long as we are evading our taxes, it is difficult to live up to the ideal of honesty. As long as we are beating our children, it is difficult to adhere to nonviolence. As long as we are swearing, using asura-invoking, profane words in the home, it will be difficult to cultivate patience. As long as we indulge in pornography, a mental form of adultery, it will be difficult to practice purity. Yes, it will be difficult to cultivate a contemplative nature. All these and more will require serious

penance, prayaschitta as it is known in Sanskrit, to change the nature and bring it into harmony with the profound ideals of the ancient Indian sages and yogis.

We carry with us in our instinctive nature basic tendencies to break these divine laws, to undergo the experiences that will create reactive conditions until we sit ourselves down and start to unravel the mess. If we are still reactingto our experiences, we are only starting on the yoga path to enlightenment. As soon as we cease to react, we have for the first time the vision of the innerlight.

What do we mean by this word light? We mean light literally, not metaphysically or symbolically, but light, just as you see the lightof the sun or a light emitted by a bulb. You will see light first at the top of the head, then throughout the body. An openness of mind occurs, and great peace. As a seeker gazes upon his inner light in contemplation, he continues the process of purifying the subconscious mind. As soon as that first yoga awakening comes to you, your whole nature begins to change. You have a foundationon which to continue. The yamasand the niyamasare the foundation.

Facing Life's Tests: Two feet planted firmly on the ground, the experienced devotee graciously greets the return of his own self-created karma, paving the way to its resolution rather than its ramification.

The Yamas and Niyamas

From the holy vedas we have assembled here ten yamas and ten niyamas, a simple statement of the ancient and beautiful laws of life. The ten yamasare: 1) Noninjury, ahimsa: Not harming others by thought, word, or deed. 2) Truthfulness, satya: Refraining from lyingand betraying promises. 3) Nonstealing, asteya: Neither stealing, nor coveting nor entering into debt. 4) Divine conduct, brahmacharya: Controlling lustby remainingcelibate when single, leading to faithfulness in marriage. 5) Patience, kshama: Restraining intolerance with people and impatience with circumstances. 6) Steadfastness, dhriti : Overcoming nonperseverance, fear, indecision and changeableness. 7) Compassion, daya: Conquering callous, cruel and insensitive feelings toward all beings. 8) Honesty, straightforwardness, arjava: Renouncing deceptionand wrongdoing. 9) Moderate appetite, mitahara: Neither eating too much nor consuming meat, fish, fowl or eggs. 10)

Purity, saucha: Avoiding impurityin body, mind and speech. The ten niyamasare: 1) Remorse, hri: Being modest and showing shamefor misdeeds. 2) Contentment, santosha: Seeking joy and serenity in life. 3) Giving,dana: Tithingand giving generously without thought of reward. 4) Faith,astikya: Believing firmly in God, Gods, guru and the path to enlightenment. 5) Worshipof the Lord,Isvarapujana: The cultivation of devotion through daily worship and meditation. 6) Scriptural listening, siddhantasravana: Studying the teachings and listening to the wise of one's lineage. 7)Cognition,mati: Developing a spiritual will and intellect with the guru's guidance. 8) Sacredvows,vrata: Fulfilling religious vows, rules and observances faithfully. 9) Recitation,japa: Chanting mantras daily. 10) Austerity,tapas: Performing sadhana,penance, tapas and sacrifice.