



Yama and Niyama: Foundations for Spiritual Life

Maetreyii Nolan PhD

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Patanjali is credited with having codified preexisting yogic techniques into the system of spiritual practices known as "astanga yoga". Patanjali's astanga yoga is the basis for virtually all contemporary schools of yoga. "Astanga" means "eight-limbed" referring to the eight categories of spiritual practice contained in this system. The first two limbs are known as "yama" and "niyama". Yama and niyama are concerned with personal behavior, with the practice of moral approaches to life which assist in spiritual development. Yama consists of five kinds of behavioral avoidances or abstinences and niyama consists of five kinds of observances. While this book concerns the moral practices of astanga yoga, its value is not limited to those engaged in a yogic approach to spiritual life. There is nothing sectarian about yama and niyama and nothing in this book's approach that is relevant only to those on a particular path. The discussion of morality contained in this book is universal and knowledge useful to spiritual life can be gained by all readers. The text of this book is drawn from oral discourses and the oral nature of the discourses has been preserved in its

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