UNIT 10. BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO ASHTANGA YOGA I

UNIT STRUCTURE

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10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- learn the meaning, concept of Yama and its types
- learn the meaning, concept of Niyama and its types
- learn the meaning of Asana, its technique and its results

10.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit one gets the understanding of the first three limbs of Ashtanga Yoga i.e.- Yama Niyama and Asana. It also gives the idea of the types of Yamas and Niyamas along with the Asana and its results of mastering an Asana.

10.3 CONCEPT OF YAMA, ITS TYPES AND FRUITS

Yama

Yama, the first limb of Ashtanga Yoga, is described in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras as universal ethical norms that govern behaviour toward others. It establishes a moral framework for spiritual practice and social harmony. Yama purifies acts, lowers inner conflict, increases self-discipline, ethical awareness, and inner balance, laying a solid basis for meditation and preparing the practitioner for

deeper stages of yoga, meditation, and self-realisation.
It comprises of five universal moral observances that govern one's interactions with others and society.

The five Yamas as mentioned in Patanjali Yoga Sutra are -

अहिंसासत्यास्तेयब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रहायमाः ॥2/30(P.Y.S.)॥

Ahimsāsatyästeyabrahmacharyāparigrahāyamāḥ

Ahimsa: non-violence, satya: truthfulness; asteya: honesty, brah-macharya: sensual abstinence; aparigrahā: non-acquisitiveness; yamah: self-restraints.

Meaning- Non-violence, truth, honesty, sensual abstinence and non-possessiveness are the five self-restraints.

This sutra names the Yamas. They will be discussed individually in the following sutras.

Ahimsa

अहिंसाप्रतिष्ठायांतत्संनिधौवैरत्यागः ॥2/35(P.Y.S.)॥

Ahimsapratisthāyāmtatsamnidhauvairatyāgaḥ

Ahimsa: non-violence; pratisthāyām: on being firmly established; tatsamnidhau: in its vicinity; vaira: hostility; tyāgah: abandonment

Meaning-On being firmly established in ahimsa, there is abandon-ment of hostility in his vicinity.

Ahimsa means love, harmlessness, non-killing, non-violence. It means absence of enmity, hostility and harm. For the spiritual aspirant it should mean absence of any harmful intention whatsoever. Pratishtha means being firmly established. When one is established in ahimsa, there develops a kind of magnetism around one that influences anybody who approaches. One becomes free of a very dangerous, evil complex - that of violence and hostility.

Satya

सत्यप्रतिष्ठायांक्रियाफलाश्रयत्वम् ॥2/36(P.Y.S.)॥

Satyapratisthāyāmkriyāphalāśrayatvam

Satya: truthfulness; pratisthāyām: on being firmly established kriyā: action; phala: result or fruit; āśrayatvam: basis

Meaning- On being firmly established in truthfulness, the actions result in fruits, entirely depending on it.

When the aspirant becomes established in truthfulness by practising it as a universal law, unconditioned by time, country, birth and circumstance, then he develops a kind of divine buddhi in himself. Thereby he is able to acquire the result from his karma according to his wish. Usually the result of karma is independent of our wishes but it is not so with a person who has perfected truthfulness.

Asteya

अस्तेयप्रतिष्ठायांसर्वरत्नोपस्थानम्॥2/37(P.Y.S.)॥

Asteyapratisthāyāmsarvaratnopasthānam

Asteya: Asteya: Non stealing or Non-Coveting, pratisthayam: on being firmly established, Sarva: all; Matra: gems; Upasthanam: Self-presentation.

Meaning: On being firmly established in Non-Covetedness Stealing or non stealing, all gems present themselves.

When the aspirant is established in the yogic virtue of Non stealing, he develops within himself the quality of lack of greed and envy. It promotes rightfully earned matters. It is beyond physical and mental theft. By establishing in this quality of Asteya, a yoga Practitioner attains all forms of wealth and Prosperity naturally.

Brahmacharya

ब्रह्मचर्यप्रतिष्ठायांवीर्यलाभः II2/38(P.Y.S.)II

Brahmacharyapratisthāyāmvīryalābhaḥ

Brahmacharya: sexual abstinence; pratisthāyām: on being firmly established; virya: indomitable courage; lābhah: gain

Meaning- On being firmly established in brahmacharya, veerya is gained.

Brahma means supreme being and charya means living, but here the word brahmacharya means eight kinds of sexual contentment. Veerya means semen, about which it is said that one drop is made out of forty drops of blood. Veerya creates vitality. It is the essence of life which ultimately converts itself into energy. Many scientists have said that veerya is nothing but hormonal secretions; however, Patanjali does not agree with this. Veerya also means indomitable courage, which is essential for sadhana. Thus, when firmly established in brahmacharya, the yogi gains vigour, energy and courage,

whereby he becomes free of the fear of death. Thus brahmacharya is an important way of overcoming the klesha called abhinivesha, which means fear of death. Brahmacharya is eightfold.

Aparigraha

अपरिग्रहस्थैर्येजन्मकथन्तासम्बोधः ॥2/39(P.Y.S.)॥

Aparigrahasthairyejanmakathantāsambodhaḥ

Aparigraha: non-possessiveness; sthairye: on becoming steady; janma: birth; kathantā: how and from where; sambodhah: knowl-edge

Meaning- On becoming steady in non-possessiveness, there arises the knowledge of how and from where birth (comes).

Aparigraha is one of the most important virtues. It means giving up the tendency to accumulate objects of utility and enjoyment. The aspirant keeps only those objects that are essential for living. This keeps the mind unoccupied and also he does not have to worry about anything because there in nothing there to be protected.

10.4 CONCEPT OF NIYAMA, ITS TYPES AND ITS FRUITS

Niyama

According to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, Niyama is the second limb of Ashtanga Yoga and refers to personal observances that foster inner discipline and self-awareness. While Yama guides behavior towards others, Niyama focuses on one's connection with oneself. Together, these practices foster mental clarity, emotional stability, and spiritual growth. Niyama helps to minimize inner turmoil, develop willpower, and cultivate appreciation and humility. By incorporating Niyama into daily life, a practitioner establishes a solid inner foundation for ethical living, deep meditation, and progress toward self-realization.

The five Niyamas as mentioned in Patanjali Yoga Sutra are-

शौचसंतोषतपःस्वाध्यायेश्वरप्रणिधानानिनियमाः ॥2/32(P.Y.S.)॥

Sauchasantoṣatapaḥsvādhyāyeśvarapranidhānāniniyamāḥ

Saucha: cleanliness; santosa: contentment; tapah: tapas, aus-terity; svādhyāya: self-study; iśvarapranidhānāni: surrender to God; niyamāh: fixed rules

Meaning- Cleanliness, contentment, austerity, self-study and surrender to God constitute fixed observances.

Shaucha

सत्त्वशुद्धिसौमनस्यैकाग्र्येन्द्रियजयात्मदर्शनयोग्यत्वानिच ॥2/41(P.Y.S.)॥

Sattvaśuddhisaumanasyaikāgryendriyajayātma-darśanayogyatvāni cha

Sattvaśuddhi: purity of internal being; saumanasya: cheer-fulness; ekāgrya: one-pointedness; indriyajaya: control of senses; ātmadarśana: vision of the self; yogyatvāni: fitness; cha: and

Meaning- By the practice of mental purity one acquires fitnessfor cheerfulness, one-pointedness, sense control andvision of the self.

This is also found described in the Bhagavad Gita. When the mind is purified or when mental purity is practised, one becomes fit to practise cheerfulness, concentration and sense control, and because of mental cleanliness, one is able to see the vision of one's self.

Fruits of Shaucha

शौचात्स्वांगजुगुप्सापरैरसंसर्गः ॥2/40(P.Y.S.)॥

Śauchātsvāṅgajugupsāparairasamsargah

Sauchat: from cleanliness; svānga: one's own body; jugupsā Indifference; paraih: with others; asamsargah: non-attachment

Meaning-From cleanliness there comes indifference towards body and non-attachment to others.

From this sutra begins the discussion of the Niyamas. These are fixed disciplines necessary for the practice of meditation and samadhi. All these are the means and not the end The first rule, namely, cleanliness or purity, is described in this sutra. It is said that by practising bodily or physical deanliness you develop in the course of time a kind of indifference towards your own body. At the same time a kind of non-attachment to others is also developed.

Santosha

संतोषादनुत्तमसुखलाभः ॥2/42(P.Y.S.)॥

Santosādanuttamasukhalābhaḥ

Santosat: from contentment; anuttamah: unexcelled; sukha: pleasure, happiness; lābhaḥ: gain

Meaning- Unexcelled happiness comes from the practice of contentment.
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.

Tapas

कायेन्द्रियसिद्धिरशुद्धिक्षयात्तपसः ॥2/43(P.Y.S.)॥

Käyendriyasiddhiraśuddhikṣayāttapasah

Kāya: the body; indriya: sense organ; siddhi: perfection; asudhi impurity; kṣayāt: destruction; tapasah: by austerities

Meaning- By practising austerities, impurities are destroyed and there comes perfection in the body and sense organs.

Meditation requires a perfect body and sense organs. All the organs must be healthy and perfect, otherwise meditation is disturbed. There may be pain in the joints or there may be toxins produced in the body. Those who practise meditation with an unhealthy body may suffer.

Swadhyaya

स्वाध्यायादिष्टदेवतासम्प्रयोगः ॥2/44(P.Y.S.)॥

Svādhyāyādiṣṭadevatāsamprayogaḥ

Svādhyāyāt: by self-awareness, self-observation; iṣṭadevatā: the deity of choice; samprayogah: communion

Meaning- By self-observation, union with the desired deity is brought about.

Swadhyaya means closing the eyes and observing one's own self, as in antarmouna. When it is practised, it gives rise to a faculty by which one is able to concentrate deeply on the god or goddess of choice.

IshwaraPranidhana

समाधिसिद्धिरीश्वरप्रणिधानात् ॥2/45(P.Y.S.)॥

Samādhisiddhiriśvarapraṉidhānāt

Samādhi: trance; siddhi: perfection, iśvara: God; pranidhānāt self-surrender

Meaning- Success in trance comes by complete surrender to God.

By complete surrender to God, which is very difficult, one is able to develop a state of trance. It is not exactly the samadhi which was described in the previous chapter. It is a kind of trance in which the aspirant loses body awareness and is able to start with deeper awareness and remain in a state of complete tranquillity and union. It is possible by complete surrender to God. Here God means the idea of the aspirant regarding the deity.

10.5 CONCEPT OF ASANA, ITS RESULTS

Maharshipatanjali describes asana as follows along with its fruits

स्थिरसुखमासनम्॥2/46(P.Y.S.)॥

Sthirasukhamāsanam

Sthira: steady; sukham: comfortable; āsanam: posture

Meaning- Steady and comfortable should be the posture.

The word asana is used for the meditation posture. Asana here does not mean the physical yoga exercises. Generally, this word asana is taken to mean yogic exercises, but here it only means a posture which is meant for meditation. For example, swastikasana, siddhasana, padmasana, sthirasana and sukhasana are the asanas meant for meditation, but there is no bar to other postures being counted as asanas.

Since the word literally means a method of sitting, we have to understand it that way. It is only later on that the rishis included other exercises in the system of asana, such as sirshasana, etc. There is no harm if a raja yogi practises these asanas. It does not mean that they are unnecessary just because they are not included in the sutras of Patanjali. Thus the asanas that bring about a state of equilibrium in the body should also be practised, though they are not mentioned by Patanjali.

HOW TO MASTER ASANA

प्रयत्नशैथिल्यानन्तसमापत्तिभ्याम्॥2/47(P.Y.S.)॥

Prayatnaśaithilyānantasamāpattibhyām

Prayatna: effort; śaithilya: looseness; ananta: the serpent called ananta, samäpattibhyām: by meditation

Meaning- By loosening of effort and by meditation on the serpent ananta, asana is mastered.

In order to become perfect, steady and comfortable in the asana which one has selected for meditation, one has to overcome tension and effort. So there should be relaxation of effort; there should be perfect relaxation in the asana. Secondly, the mind must be concentrated on ananta.

The word ananta means endless. It also means the snake on which Lord Vishnu rests in the ocean of milk. So, symbolically, ananta means serpent, but in this sutra the serpent refers to the kundalini shakti. The student should concentrate on the serpent power in the mooladhara chakra, or any other method of concentrating on the kundalini should be employed.

RESULT OF THIS MASTERY

ततोद्वन्द्वानभिघातः ॥2/48(P.Y.S.)॥

Tato dvandvänabhighātah

Tatah: from that; dvandva: pairs of opposites, anabhighātah: no impact

Meaning- Thereby the pairs of opposites cease to have any impact.

Dvandvas (pairs of opposites) belong to the physical as well as the mental realms. Those belonging to the physical level are heat and cold, hunger and thirst, pain and so on. The psychic or mental dvandvas are happiness and sorrow. Every now and then our mind is subjected to them by circumstances. This causes a disturbance. On hot days we perspire and are restless and when winter comes it is very cold. Thus, in summer we want to be cold and in winter we like heat. This is how the pairs of opposites disturb the mind. A student must develop resistance to these, physical as well as mental, and that is only possible through yama, niyama and asana. These dvandvas must be overcome if we want to make progress in meditation, so our resistance must be increased to overcome the disturbance and hindrance caused by the dvandvas.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1) What is yama, name its types?

Q2) What is Niyama, name its types?

Q3)What is Asana and its results?

Q4) Fill in the blanks –

i) ---------- means non violence in thought, word, and action.

ii) Yamas are the ---------- limb of the eightfold path of Yoga according to Patanjalis Yoga Sutras.

iii) ---------- refers to cleanliness or purity of body and mind.

iv) The practice of self – study and reflection is called ----------.

v) According to Patanjali, asana should be -------- and ----------.

10.6 LET US SUM UP

- The five yamas as mentioned in Patanjali Yoga Sutra are -
- अहिंसासत्यास्तेयब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रहायमाः ॥2/30(P.Y.S.)॥
- Ahimsāsatyästeyabrahmacharyāparigrahāyamāḥ
- The five Niyamas as mentioned in Patanjali Yoga Sutra are-
- शौचसंतोषतपःस्वाध्यायेश्वरप्रणिधानानिनियमाः ॥2/32(P.Y.S.)॥
- Sauchasantoṣatapaḥsvādhyāyeśvarapranidhānāniniyamāḥ
- Maharshipatanjali describes asana as follows along with its fruits
- स्थिरसुखमासनम्॥ 2/46(P.Y.S.)॥
- Sthirasukhamāsanam
- Steady and comfortable position which can be adopted for a longer duration of time
- Any type of dualities such as good or bad, success or failure can be avoided by gaining mastery over Asana.

10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to Q1. Yamas are the self restraints for an individual guiding the social life in an ideal manner. They are Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya, Aparigraha

Answer to Q2. Niyamas are the moral disciplines to shape the individual life. They are the self discilplines. They are – Saucha, Santosha, Tapas, Svadhyaya, IswarPranidhan

Answer to Q3. According to Maharshi Patanjali Asana is a steady and comfortable position which can be adopted for a longer duration of time. The spiritual aspirant of Asana is beyond the bindings of success or failure, good or bad. He is free from any type of dualities.

Answer to Q4. i) Ahimsa

ii) 1st limb

iii) Shaucha

iv) Svadhyaya

vi) Steady and comfortable

10.8 FURTHER READINGS

- Bangali Baba, The Yogasutras of Patanjali ,New Delhi, MotilalBanarsidas.
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10.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1) What does Ahimsa mean?

Q2) How many Yamas are there in Patanjali's Yoga sutras?

Q3) What is Shaucha and why is it important?

Q4) How does Patanjali define Asana in the Yoga Sutras?

Q5) How do Asanas body prepare for the meditation?

Q6) What is Yama, Explain its types and results?

Q7) What is Niyama, Explain its types and results?

Q8) What is Asana according to Maharshi Patanjali? Mention the process of mastery of Asana and its results as mentioned by Maharshi Patanjali?