

We will begin this year working with the Yamas & Niyamas in yogic thought as a foundation for our meditations. It is easy to find support for these tenets in other sacred texts and contemporary spiritual writing as well.

The Yamas and Niyamas are described as guidelines, tenets, precepts, or restraints and observances. I look at them as ethical disciplines that align with many of the wisdom teachings from across the ages. I have sought the spiritual insight of many “spiritual coaches” including Sufis of Islam, mystics of Christianity, or spiritual masters from Judaism, Hinduism, or Buddhism. “Seek and you will find” I’m taught from my Christian roots. When I explore wisdom teachings, I find much more in common than divergent in thought.

Non-violence, the first of the Yamas (there are five), is a stance of right relationship with others and with self that is neither self-sacrificing nor self-aggrandizement. Yogic thought teaches this as a cornerstone of all yoga philosophy and practice. If we don’t ground our lives and actions in nonviolence, everything else we attempt will be precarious.

Any time we feel rushed, anxious, afraid, powerless, out of balance, or critical of ourselves or others, we may lash out in ways that we regret. As we develop self-awareness in our life and our practice, we begin to recognize the nuances that tip our mood scale out of balance. This awareness can be worked with on the mat. We grow our physical and spiritual muscles when we mindfully connect our intentions with breath and movement. We trust that as we begin to successfully regulate our own thoughts, emotions, and actions, we can become increasingly nonviolent to both our self and others.

A disciplined practice of embodying our intention for nonviolence grows our capacity to become our most brilliant and best self. This practice is one that pursues love, courage, and balance. Thus, when we practice certain postures, we make the connection to draw our intention into our body and spirit through the focus of our mind.

The following poses and affirmations can be used toward this end:

Love: Chest expansion poses – any pose that opens the heart

Affirmations:

My heart swells with love for my self and others.

I feel delight and joy for my life and the people around me.

Make me an instrument of peace. – St. Francis

Whenever you are sincerely pleased, you are nourished. – Ralph Waldo Emerson

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Psalm 118

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Ephesians 4:2

In the presence of one firmly established in non-violence, all hostilities cease. Yoga Sutra 2:35

Our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action. 1 John 3:18

Courage: Warrior poses

Affirmations:

To create a world free of violence, I first and foremost must find my own courage.

I envision a goal, I work toward it with every fiber of my being, and achieve it with triumph.

I embrace challenges with a merry heart ...trusting that I am learning about myself and the world.

I endure difficulties as they grow my capacity for courage in the face of adversity.

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. 2

Timothy: 1:7

Balance: Balance poses

Affirmations:

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven. Ecclesiastes: 3:

1-8

I surrender to silence and become an empty container, which fills itself with new strength.