

How Should the Topic of Philosophy be approached in a Yoga Teacher Certification Course?

By Paul Jerard, E-RYT 500

Yogic philosophy is so vast that it could easily dominate a 200-hour Yoga teacher training. After spending a three day weekend, lecturing about how to apply Yama and Niyama in every facet of life, I realized that this workshop could have been expanded to two weekends.

However, the philosophy component is not what most Yoga teacher interns want to learn. Most people, in general, feel that Asana (Yoga posture) is the heart and soul of our practice. If life were measured only on the physical plane of existence, this might be true, but humans are also connected by mental, emotional, and spiritual growth.

Maharishi Patanjali mentions Yama and Niyama as the first two limbs of the Eight Limbed Path. Why would he mention them first? At the very least, he has tried to point out their importance. Over time, the message does not come out as it once did.

Essentially, a student should practice the first two limbs to become a serious Yoga practitioner. People confuse terms, such as "true Yogi." Is a true Yogi someone who is a vegetarian, does not drink coffee, but participates in gossip?

There is a conflict in labeling someone as a "real Yogi." Who among us has not harmed another being? Who among us has the superficial appearance of a true Yogi, but stirs up hate and intolerance? The truth be known, to follow Yama and Niyama, every day of your life, is not easy. Some will question why you do not participate in conjuring up negativity.

To do no harm, be truthful, avoid theft, be sexually responsible, and avoid greed are the Yamas. This is a simplistic explanation, but following these moral codes can bring much happiness to anyone who decides to live by practicing Yama.

To be clean, content, committed, to engage in studies, and to completely give yourself to God are the Niyamas. Again, this is a simple explanation, but this is not an easy road. Again, to follow Niyama will bring you happiness.

How many people wake up to complain every day of their life? How many people are clean in mind and body? How many people do not bother to finish anything? We do not have to pursue this line of thinking further.

The point Maharishi Patanjali makes, with the first two limbs, has nothing to do with drinking coffee or any other trivial matter. It is not an easy road to behave with kindness, tolerance, compassion, and give time or money to those who need it. Just by listening to someone who needs it, you are being a "good Yogi."

Therefore, in a Yoga instructor certification course, interns should learn the Yoga Sutras and the Hatha Yoga Pradipika. Beyond this, an overview of the Gheranda Samhita, Bhagavad Gita, and the Upanishads would be useful. Time places limitations on the depth of learning involved within a 200-hour course, so interns should be advised to make self-study (Svadyaya) a part of their daily life.

http://www.yoga-teacher-training.org/2008/07/14/how_should_the_topic_of_philosophy_be_ap/