

Yogic Self-Awareness Assessment

Following is a Self-Awareness Assessment outline. Our approach to teaching and training at Abhyasa Ashram is one of *coaching* in one-to-one or small group sessions (satsang). The purpose of *coaching* sessions on the Self-Assessment outline is to help you learn how to *self* assess. The Self-Assessment is truly intended to be an assessment *by* yourself *of* yourself. The coach is not here to analyze you or diagnose you like a typical medical or psychological assessment might be done. It is *your* personal exploration of *your own* current state of life and being. The coach has done this before and is here to facilitate your own introspection and observation.

The items of self-awareness listed below are from the perspective of yoga as seen through the tradition. By increasing self-awareness one gradually comes to see that these are *not* who we really are, which leads to the realization of the *witness* of these, the *true Self, Atman*.

What to look for in each area of self-assessment

For each of the areas of self-assessment, have the following orientations of what to look for:

- What am I doing well that I need to *continue* doing?
- What am I doing that I need to do *more* of?
- What am I doing that I need to *reduce* or *stop* doing entirely?
- What am I *not* doing that I need to *start* doing?
- In what way does this relate to my *current* situation?
- How might I plan with this in relation to my *future* situation?

Frequency of Self-Assessments

- Initial Self-Assessment with coach
- Ongoing Self-Assessment and training
- Monthly scanning Self-Assessment
- Quarterly complete Self-Assessment and needs analysis
- Annual thorough Self-Assessment with coach

Print out the Contents and Notes page to use for making current notes of your self-assessment. Wherever there are points that draw your attention, for which you have some need to do something, change something, etc., then circle that item and make your note in the space below. The remaining pages of this document describe the individual Self-Assessment items.

Initially, this may seem complex with lots of jargon to memorize. Rather quickly, however, it becomes natural to witness these aspects of your being. Gradually, you come to realize the one who is observing these various aspects of our self-structure (antahkarana, or inner-instrument). This leads to the doorway of deep meditation and contemplation.

Self-Awareness-Assessment Contents and Notes

(Print out this page for review and notes to yourself.)

My Name _____

Today's date (of this assessment) _____

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Yogic Self-Awareness Assessment

There is one absolute nondual reality, which is called brahman in Sanskrit. Each of us and every other living and non-living thing is of that same one essence. If this is so, one may wonder why we need to do all this inner exploration such as with this long list below. Well, it is easy for the mind to have an opinion, even a correct opinion, but never do the clearing away of false identities so as to actually have direct experience. There are many so-called *teachers* and groups around today that promote this kind of view, reasoning that if there is a little bit of intellectual understanding, that is all there is, and that this is called enlightenment. However, there is one stance, on reality of consciousness from where one can witness all of these inner elements, and that center of consciousness is known as atman. We explore all of the following so that we can gradually, systematically come to see how they interact and create the *appearance* of our being separate, individuated beings. To do anything, any project, requires first seeing the current situation as it is. That is the spirit of the *assessment* below; it is a process of periodically reviewing where we are on this journey of uncovering false identities, being ever mindful of the goal-less goal of awakening to that preexisting unity or wholeness.

Following are all categories of yoga in relation to the human being. We are using these as the framework for self-assessment in the self-awareness program of Abhyasa Ashram. They are also used in assessment with a student or client in yoga coaching.

Five States of Mind: Kshipta, Mudha, Vikshipta, Ekagra, Nirodha

These are five states of mind described by Vyasa in commentary on the Yoga Sutra 1.1.

These five states of mind range from the severely troubled mind to the completely mastered mind. It is very useful to be aware of these stages, both in the moment, and as a general day-to-day level at which one is functioning. It reveals the depth of practice that one might be able to currently practice. Some aspect of yoga meditation applies to every human being, though we need to be mindful of which is most fitting and effective for a person with this or that state of mind.

1. Kshipta/disturbed: The kshipta mind is disturbed, restless, troubled, wandering. This is the least desirable of the states of mind, in which the mind is troubled. It might be severely disturbed, moderately disturbed, or mildly disturbed. It might be worried, troubled, or chaotic. It is not merely the distracted mind (Vikshipta), but has the additional feature of a more intense, negative, emotional involvement.

2. Mudha/dull: The mudha mind is stupefied, dull, heavy, forgetful. With this state of mind, there is less of a running here and there of the thought process. It is a dull or sleepy state, somewhat like one experiences when depressed, though we are not here intending to mean only clinical depression. It is that heavy frame of mind we can get into, when we want to do nothing, to be lethargic, to be a couch potato.

The Mudha mind is barely beyond the Kshipta, disturbed mind, only in that the active disturbance has settled down, and the mind might be somewhat more easily trained from this

place. Gradually the mind can be taught to be a little bit steady in a positive way, only occasionally distracted, which is the Vikshipta state. Then the mind can move on in training to the Ekagra and Nirodhah states.

3. Vikshipta/distracted: The Vikshipta mind is distracted, occasionally steady or focused. This is the state of mind often reported by students of meditation when they are wide awake and alert, neither noticeably disturbed nor dull and lethargic. Yet, in this state of mind, one's attention is easily drawn here and there. This is the monkey mind or noisy mind that people often talk about as disturbing meditation. The mind can concentrate for short periods of time, and is then distracted into some attraction or aversion. Then, the mind is brought back, only to again be distracted.

The Vikshipta mind in daily life can concentrate on this or that project, though it might wander here and there, or be pulled off course by some other person or outside influence, or by a rising memory. This Vikshipta mind is the stance one wants to attain through the foundation yoga practices, so that one can then pursue the one-pointedness of Ekagra, and the mastery that comes with the state of Nirodhah.

4. Ekagra/one-pointed: The Ekagra mind is one-pointed, focused, concentrated (Yoga Sutra 1.32). When the mind has attained the ability to be one-pointed, the real practice of Yoga meditation begins. It means that one can focus on tasks at hand in daily life, practicing karma yoga, the yoga of action, by being mindful of the mental process and consciously serving others. When the mind is one-pointed, other internal and external activities are simply not a distraction.

The person with a one-pointed mind just carries on with the matters at hand, undisturbed, unaffected, and uninvolved with those other stimuli. It is important to note that this is meant in a positive way, not the negative way of not attending to other people or other internal priorities. The one-pointed mind is fully present in the moment and able to attend to people, thoughts, and emotions at will.

The one-pointed mind is able to do the practices of concentration and meditation, leading one onward towards samadhi. This ability to focus attention is a primary skill that the student wants to develop for meditation and samadhi.

5. Nirodhah/mastered: The Nirodhah mind is highly mastered, controlled, regulated, restrained (Yoga Sutra 1.2). It is very difficult for one to capture the meaning of the Nirodhah state of mind by reading written descriptions. The real understanding of this state of mind comes only through practices of meditation and contemplation. When the word Nirodhah is translated as controlled, regulated, or restrained, it can easily be misunderstood to mean suppression of thoughts and emotions.

To suppress thoughts and emotions is not healthy and this is not what is meant here. Rather, it has to do with that natural process when the mind is one-pointed and becomes progressively more still as meditation deepens. It is not that the thought patterns are not there, or are suppressed, but that attention moves inward, or beyond the stream of inner impressions. In

that deep stillness, there is a mastery over the process of mind. It is that mastery that is meant by Nirodhah.

Five Efforts: Shraddha, Virya, Smriti, Samadhi, Prajna

Simple, straightforward outline: The five principles and practices in this sutra form a very simple, straightforward outline of the personal commitments needed to follow the path of Self-realization. It is very useful to memorize these five, and to reflect on them often. This five-point orientation works in conjunction with the eight rungs of Yoga introduced in Sutra 2.28.

- Shraddha is a faith that you are moving in the right direction. It is not a blind faith in some organization, institution, or teacher. Rather, it is an inner feeling of certainty that you are moving in the right direction. You may not know exactly how your journey is unfolding, but have an inner intuition of walking steadily towards the goal of life. The "faith" of Yoga is not one of "blind faith" as is the case with some, if not most religions. Oral tradition of Yoga suggests that the aspirant not merely "believe" in anything. Rather, it is suggested that one test the ideas in one's own inner laboratory, with the "faith" of Yoga thus being based on direct experience. If one has practiced breath awareness and diaphragmatic breathing and finds that it leads to a calm, quiet mind, that direct experience is the foundation of the "faith" that continuing such breathing will, in the future, lead to similar experience of calm and quiet.
- Virya is the positive energy of ego that is the support for the faith of going in the right direction. This energy of virya puts the power behind your sense of knowing what to do. When you are strongly acting on what you know to be your correct path, that is virya. When you feel weak or uncertain, and are taking little action, that is from lack of virya. Virya is that conviction that says, "I can do it! I will do it! I have to do it!"
- Smriti is cultivating a constant mindfulness of treading the path, and of remembering the steps along the way. This memory is not a negative mental obsession, but rather, a gentle, though persistent awareness of the goal of life, of faith in your journey, and of your decision to commit your energy to the process. Smriti is also the practice of mindfulness of inner process, both witnessing at meditation time and during daily life. (See the article on Witnessing)
- Samadhi is intently pursued through the various stages of samadhi already described (1.17-1.18). It means committing to systematically moving through the levels or stages of samadhi, and to using these skills of attention as the tools to discriminate (2.26-2.29) the various forms of ignorance (2.5), and remembering that this is a process of systematically moving through the ever finer levels of our being (3.6).
- Prajna is the higher wisdom that comes from discrimination, and this wisdom is assiduously sought through the process of introspection (2.26-2.29), utilizing the razor-sharp tool of samadhi (3.4-3.6). Numerous levels of wisdom are experienced through the practices in Chapters 2 and 3, all of which are set aside with non-attachment (3.38). (See

also the Prajna section of the Om Mantra Article, and the Prajna section of the Levels and Dimensions of Consciousness Article.)

Four Attitudes: Friendliness, Compassion, Supportiveness, Acceptance

Each of these four attitudes (friendliness, compassion, goodwill, and neutrality) is, in a sense, a meditation unto itself (outlined in yoga sutra 1.33 as a means of stabilizing the mind). While it is actually a preparation practice, it has become popular to use the word meditation in a very broad way, rather than as the specific state of dhyana (3.2), as normally used by the yogis. Some schools of meditation base their entire approach on one or more of these four attitudes. However, to the seeker of the absolute reality (1.3), these are practiced as valuable steps along the journey, but not the end itself.

Here, in this practice, four specific types of people are mentioned (happy, suffering, virtuous, non-virtuous), how we perceive them, and what attitudes we might cultivate to stabilize, purify, or calm our own mind (attitudes of friendliness, compassion, goodwill, and neutrality).

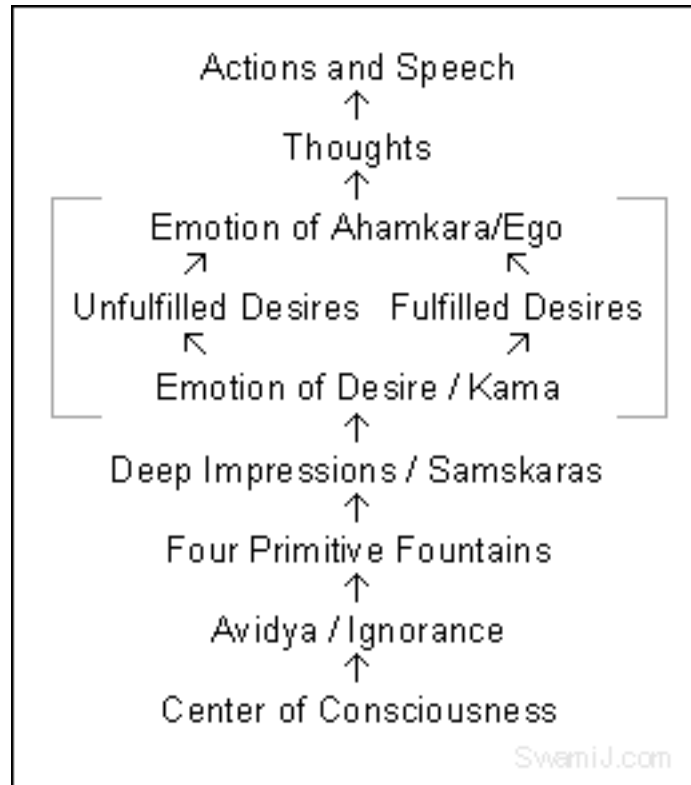
Yoga sutra 1.33: In relationships, the mind becomes purified by cultivating feelings of friendliness towards those who are happy, compassion for those who are suffering, goodwill towards those who are virtuous, and indifference or neutrality towards those we perceive as wicked or evil.

(maitri karuna mudita upekshanam sukha duhkha punya apunya vishayanam bhavanatah chitta prasadanam)

Four Functions of Mind: Manas, Chitta, Ahamkara, Buddhi

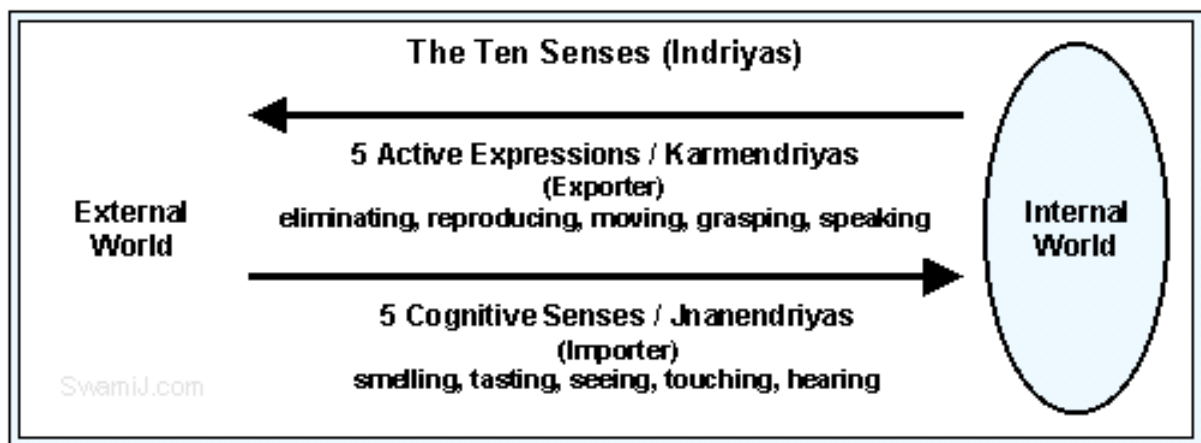
Discriminating between the four functions of mind (antahkarana, the “inner instrument”) is one of the most profound self-awareness practices of the ancient Himalayan sages. This Yoga practice is just as profoundly useful today as it was thousands of years ago. The process is one of self-observation, and gradually discriminating between these four aspects of the inner instrument, so as to attain the direct experience of the Center of Consciousness from which all of our thoughts, emotions, and experiences arise on various degrees and grades. That Center is the Witness of these Four Functions of Mind. Ultimately, one comes to know that the only stance from which these can be fully observed is that of the Center itself. The simple act of attempting to observe these Four Functions, as they function, is the key to the practice.

- Manas = sensory, processing mind
- Chitta = storage of impressions
- Ahamkara = "I-maker" or Ego
- Buddhi = knows, decides, judges, and discriminates



Four Primitive Fountains: Food, Sleep, Sex, Self-preservation

All creatures share some common drives, which form the root of all other drives, wants, wishes, or motives, which might be more specific in nature. While you might see other nuances within these, there are four basic urges for food, sleep, sex, and self-preservation. How do you see these as presently relating to you in your practices of self-awareness and meditation?



Jnanendriyas: Smelling, Tasting, Seeing, Touching, Hearing

Jnanendriyas: The five entrance doors are the five cognitive senses, which are called jnanendriyas. (Jnana means knowing. Indriyas are the means or senses.) How do you see these as presently relating to you in your practices of self-awareness and meditation?

Karmendriyas: Eliminating, Procreating, Moving, Grasping, Speaking

Karmendriyas: The five exit doors are five means of expression, which are called karmendriyas. (Karma means action. Indriyas are the means or senses.) How do you see these as presently relating to you in your practices of self-awareness and meditation?

Five vayus: Prana, Apana, Samana, Udana and Vyana vayus

Prana divides itself into five Vayus: When kundalini comes outward as Prana, the Prana operates in the body, it divides into five major flows called Vayus. These can be thought of as somewhat like major currents in one of the large oceans of the world, while there may be thousands of smaller currents. These five Vayus are the major currents that contain thousands of smaller currents.

- Prana Vayu operates from the heart area, and is an upward flowing energy, having to do with vitalizing life forces.
- Apana Vayu operates from the base of the torso, in the rectum area, is a downward flowing energy, and has to do with eliminating or throwing off what is no longer needed.
- Samana Vayu operates from the navel area, deals with digestion, and allows the mental discrimination between useful and not useful thoughts.
- Udana Vayu operates from the throat and drives exhalation, operating in conjunction with Prana Vayu, which deals with inhalation.
- Vyana Vayu operates throughout the whole body, having no particular center, and is a coordinating energy throughout the various systems.

Five Bhutas/Elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Space

The Mahabhutas (maha=great, bhutas=elements) are Earth (Prithivi), Water (Apas), Fire (Tejas or Agni), Air (Vayu) and Space or Ether (Akasha). Which, if any, of these has some deficiency or needs to be in better balance with the others? In what way or ways?

Three Gunas: Sattvas, Rajas, Tamas

The three gunas of Prakriti (subtlest unmanifest matter).

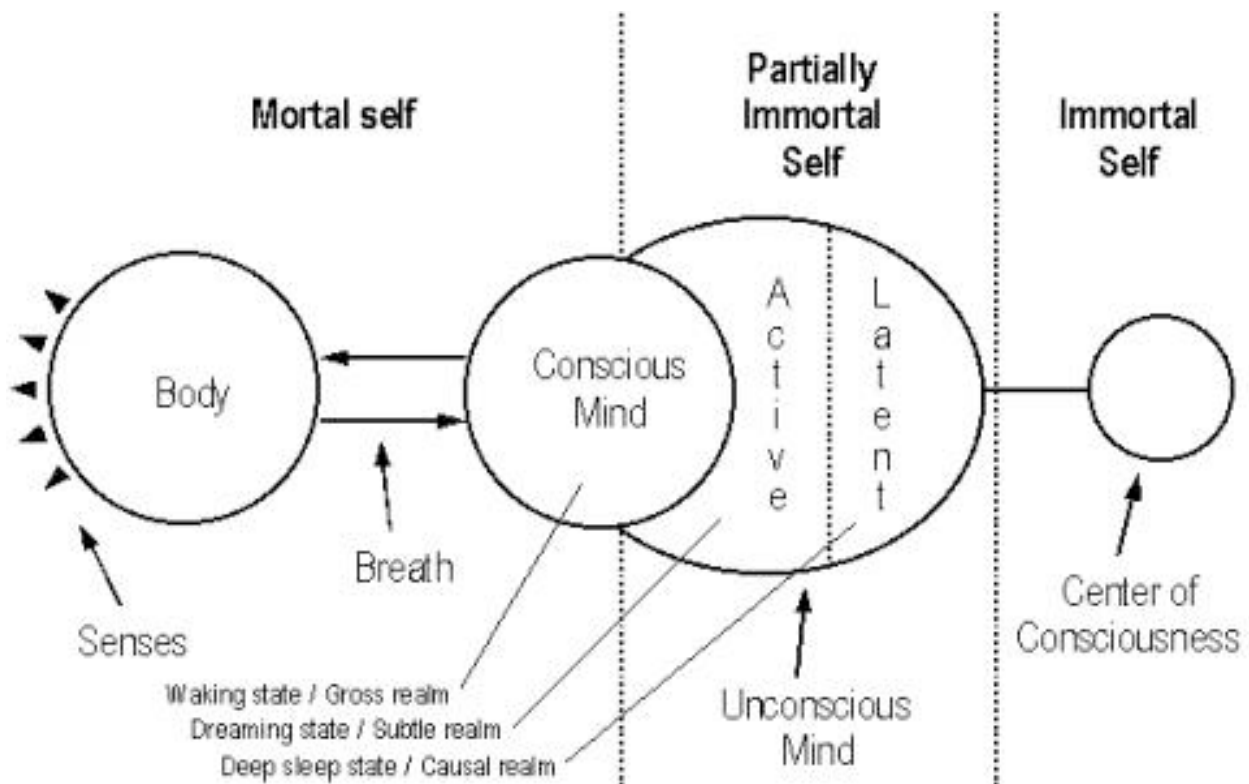
- Tamas : The first two chakras relate to the primal activities that operate in relation to the physical world, including the drives for self-preservation and procreation, effectively obscuring higher experience. Tamas is the aspect of prakriti, which has the nature of stability, stasis, darkness, dullness, heaviness, insentience, obstructing, and veiling. Tamas can be heaviness and inertia, but is also stability or groundedness.
- Rajas: The third and fourth chakras, the navel and the heart centers, involve a subtler relationship with the world, working with one's individuality rather than just engaging the

physical world. Rajas is the aspect of prakriti, which has the nature of activity, motion, energy, movement, or changing. It can relate to hyperactivity or positive action.

- Sattva: The fifth and sixth chakras, the throat and the eyebrow centers, begin movement away from the outer towards the inner world of purity, intuition, creativity, and wisdom, from which the outer arises. Sattvas is the aspect of the subtlest primordial matter (prakriti), which has the nature of existence, light, illumination, sentience, harmony, or clearing. Sattvas is purity and light, but in the absence of the positive aspects of rajas and tamas can be an ungrounded mind.

Circle Chart: Actions, Senses, Body, Breath, Cs. Mind, Active Ucs, Latent Ucs, Center

How do you see these as presently relating to you in your practices of self-awareness and meditation?



Five kinds of thoughts: Pramana (correct). Viparyaya (incorrect), Vikalpa (fantasy), Nidra (Sleep), Smriti (memory)

The five varieties of thought patterns to witness are: 1) knowing correctly (pramana), 2) incorrect knowing (viparyaya), 3) fantasy or imagination (vikalpa), 4) the object of void-ness that is deep sleep (nidra), and 5) recollection or memory (smriti). How do you see these as presently relating to you in your practices of self-awareness and meditation?

Yoga sutra 1.6 The five varieties of thought patterns to witness are: 1) knowing correctly (pramana), 2) incorrect knowing (viparyaya), 3) fantasy or imagination (vikalpa), 4) the

object of void-ness that is deep sleep (nidra), and 5) recollection or memory (smriti).
(pramana viparyaya vikalpa nidra smritayah)

Five kleshas: Avidya, Asmita, Raga, Dvesha, Abhinivesha

Cultivating self-awareness of the five kleshas is one of the most important foundation practices in the entire science of Yoga. Which of these is presently dominant for you? In what ways? What do you see as useful to be currently doing in relation to this?

- Avidya = spiritual forgetting, ignorance, veiling, nescience
- Asmita = associated with I-ness
- Raga = attraction or drawing to, addiction
- Dvesha = aversion or pushing away, hatred
- Abhinivesha = resistance to loss, fear of death of identity, desire for continuity, clinging to the life of

Four stages of kleshas: Udaram (active), Vicchinna (separated), Tanu (attenuated), Parsupta (dormant)

The above five kleshas (colorings) are in one of four stages. As you reflect on these four stages, which stands out for you now, at this time, as being most related to your current situation, or most needing your attention?

- prasupta = dormant, latent, seed
- tanu = attenuated, weakened
- vicchinna = distanced, separated, cut off, intercepted, alternated
- udaranam = fully active, aroused, sustained

Four kinds of avidya: Temporary/Eternal, Impure/Pure, Pain/Pleasure, Not-self/Self

Ignorance (avidya) is of four types: 1) regarding that which is transient (anitya) as eternal (nitty), 2) mistaking the impure (ashuchi) for pure (shuchi), 3) thinking that which brings misery (duhkha) to bring happiness (sucha), and 4) taking that which is not-self (anatmasu) to be self (atman). How do you presently relate to these four? Which stands out at most needing your attention currently?

Eight rungs of yoga: Yamas, Niyamas, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi

The eight rungs, limbs, or steps of Yoga are the codes of self-regulation or restraint (yamas), observances or practices of self-training (niyamas), postures (asana), expansion of breath and prana (pranayama), withdrawal of the senses (pratyahara), concentration (dharana), meditation (dhyana), and perfected concentration (samadhi). What is your present relationship with these in your sadhana (practices)? Which of these do you most need to emphasize right now?

Five yamas: Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya, Aparigraha

Non-injury or non-harming (ahimsa), truthfulness (satya), abstention from stealing (asteya), walking in awareness of the highest reality (brahmacharya), and non-possessiveness or non-grasping with the senses (aparigraha) are the five yamas, or codes of self-regulation or restraint, and are the first of the eight steps of Yoga. How do you self-assess in relation to these at this time?

Five niyamas: Saucha, Santosha, Tapas, Svadhyaya, Ishvara pranidhana

Cleanliness and purity of body and mind (shaucha), an attitude of contentment (santosha), asceticism or training of the senses (tapas), self-study and reflection on sacred words (svadhyaya), and an attitude of letting go into one's source (ishvarapranidhana) are the observances or practices of self-training (niyamas), and are the second rung on the ladder of Yoga.

Chakras: Muladhara, Svadhistana, Manipura, Anahata, Visshudha, Ajna, Sahasrara

What is your present situation with the seven chakras of Muladhara, Svadhistana, Manipura, Anahata, Visshudha, Ajna, Sahasrara? Are you experiencing any problems with any of them in particular? Which presently draws your attention more than the others? Which is least significant for you right now? To what degree are the seven flowing together?

Source of Karma: Actions/Speech/Thoughts, Ahamkara/Ego, Fulfilled/Unfulfilled, Kama, Samskaras, Primitive Urges, Avidya, Center of Consciousness

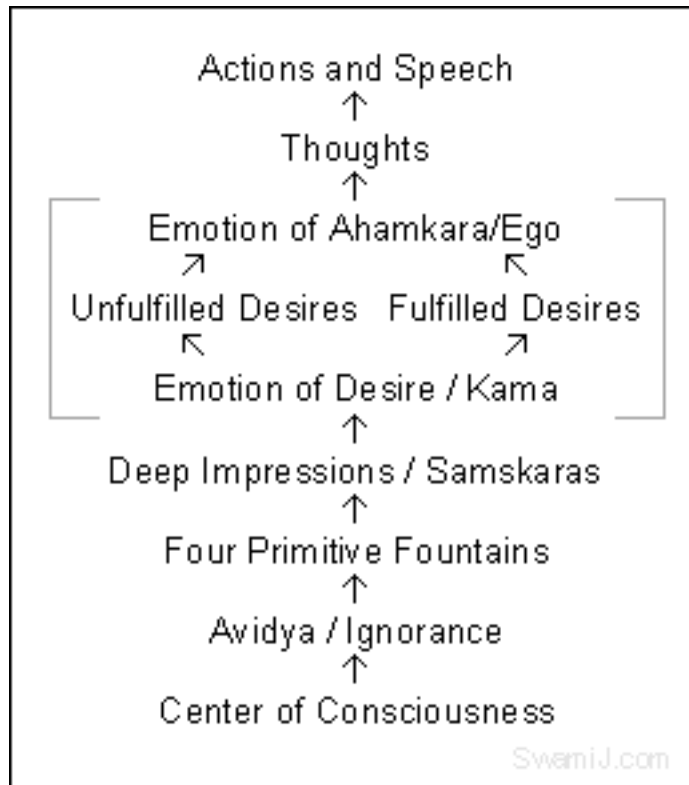
These are the stages described in the Karma article by Swami Jnaneshvara. How are these levels presently flowing together? Which of the stages is presently standing out for you as something to be mindful of? What actions may be needed?

The word Karma literally means action. It may appear that Karma is happening to us, as if some outside force is causing good things or bad things to come to us. However, it is really our own inner conditionings and processes that are leading us to experience outer effects or consequences in relation to our own actions.

The law of Karma is a universal process, whereby causes lead to effects. This is something that all of us are already familiar with, whether or not we use the word Karma to describe it. Newton's third law of motion, that every action leads to a reaction, is an application of the law of Karma. Whether we are talking about physics or daily life in the world, it is extremely useful to understand the law and process of Karma so that we may regulate or direct the process. We can soften the impact of the playing out of our past Karmas, and can choose our own future Karma if we are willing to put in the effort to learn how to do it.

When journeying through the process of Karma, it can start to feel a bit heavy with all the explanations and inner explorations. The best companion on this journey through Karma is to remember that we are trying to experience that Bliss, Joy, or Absolute Truth, which is beyond, behind, or underneath all of the Karma. By remembering that the goal is Joy, Bliss,

or Absolute, we (and the mind) will have a focal point and a context for all of the efforts put into sadhana (spiritual practices). Above all else, seek that Joy or Bliss.



Doshas of Ayurveda: Vata, Pitta, Kapha

Which of your doshas (of Ayurveda) is dominant and how is the balance between them? What do you need to do in relation to balancing them?

Understanding what you need to do to achieve total health is as simple as understanding Vata, Pitta and Kapha - the three fundamental principles of nature which govern all the activities of your mind and body;

- **Vata** is quick, cold and dry by nature. It governs motion, breathing, circulation, elimination and the flow of nerve impulses to and from the brain.
- **Pitta** is hot and precise by nature. It governs digestion and metabolism and the processing of food, air and water throughout the body.
- **Kapha** is solid and steady by nature. It governs structure and fluid balance and forms muscle, fat, bone and sinew.

We all have a certain amount of Vata, Pitta and Kapha in our constitution and while all three of them are active, one or two usually dominate.