



YS 2.36 satya-pratiṣṭhāyām kriyā-phala āśrayatvam

*When established in truthfulness, words and actions
are consistent*

Next, we come to *satya*, related to the Sanskrit term *sat*, meaning ‘that which is real’. *Satya* is communication that reflects what is real or true, and is genuine and authentic. If *ahimsā* concerns the space that we can offer another in a relationship, *satya* is about the space that we occupy and the quality of the presence that we ourselves offer. *Satya* is concerned with our authenticity in the relationship, in being present, engaged and honest in our communication.

The first step in this is to be present, to put something of ourselves into the relationship, rather than hide behind some convenient mask. The second step is to communicate our truth rather than take refuge in superficial pleasantries. This is about authenticity, where there is congruence between our being and what we express. In stating our truth, however, there are limits. In counselling, we talk about ‘appropriate transparency’: that is, communicating honestly but bounded by a measure of appropriateness. What is this level of appropriateness? The *Mahābhārata* says, “Speak the truth which is pleasant. Do not speak unpleasant truths. Do not lie, even if the lies are pleasing to the ear.” *Satya*, in other words, is always tempered by *ahimsā* and should never arise from anger, frustration or a wish to harm the other person.

We should also remember that **our** truth is not necessarily The Truth. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* breaks down the word into three parts: *sa*, *ti* and *ya*: “The first and last syllables are the truth. In the middle is untruth. This untruth is enclosed on both sides by truth; thus truth prevails. Untruth does not hurt him who knows this.”² In other words, our own partial or relative truth – truth with a small ‘t’ if you like – is part of and contained by the larger, universal Truth. In the Yoga Sūtra this ‘eternal truth’ is called *ṛta*. In a practical sense, *ahimsā* and *satya* provide mutual

limits to the empathic space that we can offer to another and the appropriately transparent expression of our truth.

When we express ourselves truthfully and appropriately, there is an energetic power to which those around us and the world itself seem to respond. YS 2.36 states that when we are established in *satya*, there is a positive correspondence between our actions and their intended consequences. It is as if our words and actions have power because they reflect something inherently true. Those around us recognise this, and respond accordingly.

The space of *ahiṃsā* invites the other to feel accepted, their communication truly heard, with no need for defensiveness. The space of *satya* invites us to be authentically present and to communicate honestly and transparently, within the limits set by the principles of *ahiṃsā* and *satya* themselves. In such circumstances, the relationship may deepen, and the next pair of *yama* become more acutely relevant.

Keeping a relationship simple and open: *asteya* and *brahmacarya*



YS 2.37 *asteya-pratiṣṭhāyām* *sarva-ratna upasthānam*

When established in not stealing, many treasures arise

As time passes in any relationship, things get more complicated. Perhaps we get to know someone better, we know more about their lives, and our interaction may become increasingly habitual. In couples, individuals can lose their independent identity outside of the relationship. What may have started as a relationship with clear boundaries, such as a working or professional relationship, can easily begin to overflow into other areas. Subtly, people can begin to manipulate or take advantage of one another, even if this happens on an entirely unconscious level. Familiarity, as the saying goes, often breeds contempt.

If we are not careful, we can become increasingly enmeshed and the relationship loses its vitality as its original purpose becomes compromised. This is a classic example of *samyoga*, where a relationship becomes confused and there is a loss of freedom. *Asteya* and *brahmacarya* become increasingly relevant as an antidote to the potential for this *samyoga*.

Asteya is literally ‘non-stealing’. This has an obvious meaning in not stealing physical objects. But we must also consider the many ways we can take from another person what is rightly theirs: how we might steal their attention, their ideas, and even profit unfairly from their company and association.

Asteya may be understood as ‘not taking advantage of the other’. It is a development of *ahimsā* and particularly comes to bear as a relationship deepens. Like *ahimsā*, it is concerned with the quality of the space that we offer the other person in a relationship, a space in which they are not exploited or used in any way. According to the Yoga Sūtra, if we can really embrace *asteya* we will receive ‘treasures’. The metaphor of treasure, or precious gems (*ratna*), is commonly used in Indian philosophy to indicate the richness of life. So, in fact, through embracing *asteya* we have the possibility of receiving so much more – something that touches life itself, rich and fresh: the product of open and free interaction rather than of grasping and manipulation.



YS 2.38 brahmacarya-pratiṣṭhāyām vīrya-lābhah

For one who maintains priorities, tremendous energy develops

As the twin of *asteya*, *brahmacarya* is concerned with how we maintain our focus in the relationship as it develops. We understand *brahmacarya* as ‘not losing our priorities’ in