



Through the Yogic Lens

Integrating Yoga Philosophy & Traditional Chinese Medicine within Prana Pilates

A Brief History of Yoga

Yoga is one of the world's oldest systems of personal transformation, tracing back over 5,000 years to the Indus Valley civilization. Originally transmitted through oral tradition, yoga evolved as a holistic path that unified body, mind, and spirit in pursuit of liberation (moksha).

Around 200 BCE, the sage Patañjali codified the teachings of yoga into The Yoga Sūtras, a collection of 196 aphorisms that form the philosophical foundation of most modern yoga practice.

Within this text, Patañjali outlined the Eight Limbs of Yoga (Ashtanga Yoga) — a progressive system of self-mastery that guides practitioners from ethical living toward higher states of consciousness.

The first two limbs—Yamas and Niyamas—form the ethical and spiritual groundwork for all practice. They are not commandments, but invitations for awareness and refinement: ways of relating to others and to oneself that harmonize inner and outer life.

Just as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) speaks of harmony between Yin and Yang, the Yamas and Niyamas cultivate balance between action and reflection, discipline and surrender, effort and compassion.

The Yamas & Niyamas

Yamas - Ethical Disciplines

Sanskrit	Translation	Meaning / Application
Ahimsa	Non-harming	Cultivating compassion in thought, word, and action. Practicing safety, kindness, and respect toward all beings.
Satya	Truthfulness	Speaking and living authentically, aligning one's words and actions with integrity.
Asteya	Non-stealing	Releasing grasping; trusting abundance rather than taking what isn't freely given—time, energy, or credit.
Brahmacharya	Moderation / Right Use of Energy	Channeling energy with awareness; practicing balance rather than excess or depletion.
Aparigraha	Non-attachment / Non-hoarding	Letting go of clinging to outcomes, possessions, or identities. Living lightly and with trust.

Niyamas - Inner Observances

Sanskrit	Translation	Meaning / Application
Saucha	Purity	Cleansing body, mind, and environment to create clarity and spaciousness.
Santosha	Contentment	Cultivating gratitude and peace with what is; releasing comparison and striving.
Tapas	Disciplined Effort	The fire of transformation—consistent, courageous practice in the face of challenge.
Svādhyāya	Self-study	Reflecting inward to understand one's patterns, emotions, and deeper purpose.
Īśvara Pranidhāna	Surrender to the Divine	Trusting in a greater order; releasing control and aligning with flow.

The Yogic Lens in Pilates

The fusion of yoga philosophy, Pilates anatomy, and TCM creates a multidimensional approach to embodiment. Each principle becomes not just theory but felt experience; a guide for teaching, cueing, and self-reflection.

Ahimsa - Non-Harming in Practice

To embody Ahimsa is to teach and move with compassion, safety, and inclusivity.

In Pilates:

- **Accessible Options:** Offer layered modifications for every posture—bent knees, props, single-leg variations—so every student feels capable.
- **Energetic Balance:** Recognize cycles of energy. Some days call for Fire (Agni); others for cooling, restorative flow.
- **Conscious Safety:** Prioritize control before range, breath before effort. Invite pauses and rest as acts of wisdom.
- **Inclusivity:** Honor diversity in body, age, and energy. Every expression is valid and beautiful.

Practical Teaching Cues:

Wood Element: “Lengthen gently in your twist—comparison is not the path to growth.”

Metal Element: “Expand only to the point that nourishes; honoring your edge is honoring yourself.”

Earth Element: “Root into stability with compassion—choose the variation that supports your body today.”

Water Element: “Soften into surrender; forcing is not flowing.”

Fire Element: “Stoke your Agni without burning out—notice when strength becomes strain.”

Satya - Truthfulness in Expression

To embody Satya is to teach and move with honesty, clarity, and authenticity.

In Pilates:

- Embodied Integrity: Speak from experience; teach what you practice and believe in.
- Energetic Alignment: Invite students to move from their truth—how the body feels, not how it “should” look.
- Honest Observation: Encourage self-inquiry through breath and sensation rather than performance.
- Authentic Voice: Allow your teaching tone to reflect your genuine energy, whether soft, fiery, or grounding.

Practical Teaching Cues:

Wood Element: “Grow in your own direction—truth unfolds through presence.”

Metal Element: “Let honesty guide your movement; refinement begins with awareness.”

Earth Element: “Stay anchored in your truth—no need to overreach.”

Water Element: “Let your truth flow; movement reveals what words cannot.”

Fire Element: “Shine with sincerity—your authenticity inspires others.”

Asteya - Non-Stealing of Energy

To embody Asteya is to teach with generosity and boundaries, respecting the energy exchange between teacher and student.

In Pilates:

- Energetic Reciprocity: Offer guidance without over-giving; allow space for student discovery.
- Empowerment: Encourage independence—remind students their practice is theirs to own.
- Time Integrity: Begin and end on time, honoring everyone’s energy.
- Authentic Giving: Share from abundance, not depletion.

Practical Teaching Cues:

Wood Element: “Give yourself space to grow—your timing is divine.”

Metal Element: “Honor your capacity—less can be more.”

Earth Element: “Give from groundedness; don’t pour from an empty cup.”

Water Element: “Flow with balance—receive as you give.”

Fire Element: “Share your light without burning yourself out.”

Brahmacharya - Energy Moderation

To embody Brahmacharya is to move and teach with balanced energy—focused, intentional, and sustainable.

In Pilates:

- Mindful Effort: Guide students to work efficiently, not excessively.
- Sustainable Flow: Sequence for longevity—alternating strength, mobility, and rest.
- Sacred Focus: Keep attention within—direct energy inward to awareness.
- Energetic Hygiene: Leave space between classes or clients for energetic reset.

Practical Teaching Cues:

Wood Element: “Expand, but stay rooted—growth thrives in balance.”

Metal Element: “Conserve energy where not needed; refine your effort.”

Earth Element: “Build strength steadily—consistency over intensity.”

Water Element: “Move like water—strong yet effortless.”

Fire Element: “Channel your fire; let it illuminate, not consume.”

Aparigraha - Non-Grasping

To embody Aparigraha is to release attachment to results and embrace presence in practice.

In Pilates:

- Letting Go: Guide students to focus on sensation, not outcome.
- Presence: Invite awareness of what's unfolding now.
- Minimalism: Simplify cues; create space for breath and silence.
- Surrender: Trust that progress happens naturally with time and consistency.

Practical Teaching Cues:

Wood Element: “Unfold without force—growth takes patience.”

Metal Element: “Exhale what's complete—freedom lives in release.”

Earth Element: “Ground in gratitude for what is.”

Water Element: “Let your body guide you—flow, don't force.”

Fire Element: “Shine without striving; your light is already enough.”

NIYAMAS

Saucha - Purity and Clarity

To embody Saucha is to cultivate cleanliness in body, mind, and space.

In Pilates:

- Clarity of Cueing: Speak with precision and simplicity.
- Energetic Cleanliness: Begin each class with a clear intention.
- Physical Space: Create an environment that feels open, fresh, and safe.
- Emotional Hygiene: Let go of personal energy before teaching.

Practical Teaching Cues:

Wood Element: “Move with intention—clarity creates freedom.”

Metal Element: “Inhale purity, exhale release.”

Earth Element: “Keep your foundation clear—simplicity is strength.”

Water Element: “Let breath cleanse your system with each flow.”

Fire Element: “Let light burn away what clouds your focus.”

Santosha - Contentment

To embody Santosha is to rest in acceptance and gratitude, both in teaching and self-practice.

In Pilates:

- Acceptance: Encourage curiosity instead of judgment.
- Gratitude: Celebrate small victories and mindful progress.
- Calm Presence: Teach from a grounded, centered space.
- Joy in Process: Focus on how movement feels, not what it achieves.

Practical Teaching Cues:

Wood Element: “Expand within your current range—enough is enough.”

Metal Element: “Exhale into contentment; you are complete right now.”

Earth Element: “Root into what’s steady; peace grows here.”

Water Element: “Let gratitude flow through your body.”

Fire Element: “Glow gently—joy doesn’t have to be loud.”

Tapas - Discipline and Inner Fire

To embody Tapas is to embrace the balance of effort and surrender through consistent practice.

In Pilates:

- **Dedication:** Show up with integrity, even when motivation fades.
- **Balanced Intensity:** Cultivate strength with awareness, not strain.
- **Heat as Transformation:** Use controlled effort to build resilience.
- **Resilience:** Teach perseverance while honoring rest as part of the process.

Practical Teaching Cues:

Wood Element: “Channel your willpower into aligned action.”

Metal Element: “Refine your strength with precision.”

Earth Element: “Build steady heat from your center.”

Water Element: “Let effort flow without rigidity.”

Fire Element: “Ignite your core, but protect your flame.”

Svadhyaya - Self-Study

To embody Svadhyaya is to use movement as a mirror for inner awareness and self-inquiry.

In Pilates:

- Mindful Observation: Encourage noticing patterns - where effort feels easy or forced.
- Self-Reflection: Ask students to connect with what they learn about themselves through practice.
- Embodied Awareness: Movement becomes meditation in motion.
- Curiosity: Replace judgment with compassionate observation.

Practical Teaching Cues:

Wood Element: “Grow through awareness—each movement teaches you.”

Metal Element: “Refine your patterns—self-knowledge brings freedom.”

Earth Element: “Stay rooted in presence as you explore.”

Water Element: “Let reflection reveal your rhythm.”

Fire Element: “See your passion as your teacher.”

Ishvara Pranidhana - Surrender to the Divine

To embody Ishvara Pranidhana is to trust in the flow of life and release control to a higher wisdom.

In Pilates:

- Trust: Let the breath lead and the body follow.
- Humility: Honor the intelligence within each movement.
- Faith: Release perfection; presence is enough.
- Grace: Teach with reverence for the unseen guidance in every breath.

Practical Teaching Cues:

Wood Element: “Flow with life’s unfolding, trust your path.”

Metal Element: “Exhale control, surrender is strength.”

Earth Element: “Ground in faith; the support you need is beneath you.”

Water Element: “Let your body move with gratitude.”

Fire Element: “Offer your effort to something greater.”