



Who Me, Stealing?, by Constance Habash

When I'm teaching the five (ethical principles of Yoga), I often feel a little stumped with conveying the practical application of (one of the principles) Asteya (pronounced "ay-stay-uh"), known as "non-stealing". Most of us think we have that one nailed. Of course, I know not to steal! But the subtle and less obvious applications of Asteya show up in all areas of our life, on and off the mat.

Stealing, according to Webster's dictionary, means "to take or appropriate without permission, dishonestly, especially in a secret or surreptitious manner". We steal when we don't have the means to purchase, the capability to produce (as in ideas or copywritten materials), or when we have the belief that we could not otherwise gain or possess what is desired by honest means. We steal when we feel a lack or a void and are desperate to fill it, be it in our stomach, our closet, or our pride. Stealing encompasses everything from the simple swiping of a loaf of bread to distracting attention away from the one who merited it.

Although few of us, fortunately, have stolen a loaf of bread, we may have, consciously or unconsciously, participated in stealing many times in the past. It's common to come home from work and end up with pens from the office store room in our drawers, or even from the local gift shop that you automatically put in your purse after signing the credit slip. Some of us in college photocopied material that we did not have permission to, or included information from a source without quoting it while writing an essay. Although these actions do indeed constitute stealing, these are relatively easy behaviors to change, and should be changed to truly embody Asteya.

However, the more subtle and less obvious aspects of Non-Stealing are challenging, and often we have to learn how to see these patterns in order to change them. Usually, stealing in any form emerges from a deep-seated fear. Whether it's a fear of not finding our next meal or of being inadequate, the roots of fear need to be found and pulled out before the garden of Asteya can flourish.

Greed, a form of stealing, is rampant in the world today and we are seeing the results as our forests dwindle, the poor starve, the skies pollute, and our waters clog with waste and toxins. We may not even be aware of being greedy because its seeds are subtly planted everyday through the media, enticing us to constantly desire and take more and more. From the air we breathe to the cars we drive, most of us

consume more than we nurture the earth.Â Swami Satchidananda says that buying more than we need is actually stealing things â€œby not letting others use them.â€•Â

As we explore Asteya deeper, we realise that itâ€™s not enough to not-steal.Â Generosity is the heart of Asteya.Â We give because of the joy of giving, not just in order to receive what we want. When we feel full-filled with what we have and who we are, we find that we have much to offer others.Â Whether we choose to pass on material things we no longer need or to offer our time, energy, and love, becoming generous and thoughtful beings is at the core of the practice of non-stealing.

Fully embodied in Asteya, non-stealing, we become content and peaceful. A peaceful mind is our greatest wealth.

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