

## YOGA & COMMANDMENTS

Is Yoga a religion? Is there a relationship between Yoga and Judaism? How are they similar and how are they different? These are common questions that people have regarding the subject. The goal of Yoga is to help a person achieve a frame of mind and a way of being where one can see the unity in all life. It is not a religion but a practice that will help the individual achieve this end. On the other hand, Judaism is a religion, it is a comprehensive belief system where seeing the unity of G-d as the essence of the universe is a major tenant. However, in Jewish philosophy the goal is not focused on the individual achieving enlightenment but on the individual as a member of a community and as a tool for effecting change in society. One is focused inward where the other is focused outward. Judaism and the science of Yoga share other fundamental principals. For example, karma and the belief in past lives is known as gilgul in Hebrew. Meditation was a common practice among the sages of the Talmud, The studying of religious texts and chanting is common among Hassidic groups. These are all part of the Yogic tradition as well. While there is no formal connection between the two they do share similar concepts, methods and ultimate goal, to turn you into a **mensch**. **The Ten Commandments of Yoga** by Reverend Sam Rudra [“The Sarge” Swartz](#) When one studies the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali or Raja Yoga, everything relates to the second sutra of the first book which states Yogas Chitta Vritti Nirodaha, The restraint of the modifications of the mind stuff is Yoga (Swami Satchidananda Commentary). The whole practice of yoga or any individual practice of yoga is designed to bring these mental modifications into control so the mind can focus on one thing. The word yoga itself means union or to bind back to our most natural state of peace, a peaceful mind, feeling oneness with the divine, having “it” all “together.” The root of the word religion, from the Latin, “religio,” also means to bind back to our divine nature, transcending the mundane, the physical plane. The Yoga Sutras give us a simple remedy for feeling this oneness, or finding this quiet mind: *Abyasa and Vairagya*...Practice and Non-Attachment. Practice is defined as effort towards steadiness of mind and the recipe for the practices of yoga is illustrated in the Second Book, *Sadhana Pada*, with the 29th Sutra which lists the Eight Limbs of Yoga or *Ashtanga Yoga*. The first two limbs are *Yama*, the restraints, and *Niyama*, the observances which contain five concepts each and are sometimes called, “The Ten Commandments of Yoga.” There are ten of these concepts but the question is presented: are they the same as the Ten Commandments in the Torah? While the 5 *Yamas* and 5 *Niyamas* present the restraints (the don’ts) and the observances (the dos), they do not necessarily align literally, one for one, with the Ten Commandments as presented in the Torah. Where the Torah is worded in a demanding language; translated as, “Thou Shalt!” or “Thou Shalt Not!” the yoga sutras are worded less directly not translated as though you “have to,” or “better not,” do something but given as a simple list designed for those who wish to experience a mind where the

constant fluctuations are calm for an experience of yoga. I like to put it into a more plain language and I feel like it comes across, in my own words, more like: if you want a quiet mind with the experience of undisturbed peace i.e. Yoga; practice these 8 Limbs. This first limb: don't do these things; the second limb: do'em! What is similar is the presentation of an ethical code and practices to keep your energy centered, the mind focused and ways to maintain your peace. Don't disturb the mind by participating in activities, behaviors, or actions that bring pain...the selfish, those things which flow against what is organically ethical. Do practice, in a pure way, those activities, behaviors, and actions that are selfless...painless, allowing for a more effortless connection to the unchanging spirit, the divine. The 31st Sutra in the second book states that the Yamas apply to everyone no matter what your class of society, level of education, or what time period you live in even if you are not interested in practicing yoga, religion, or have any faith or beliefs according to any given path. The Niyamas seem to be directed at people who do have beliefs or are interested in a quiet mind, pursuing a union/relationship with the divine and are also interested in practicing the other six limbs of yoga: asana (poses), pranayama (breath connection), pratyahara (sense withdrawal), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation), and Samadhi (absorption). The Ten Commandments, we know, were brought to the Jewish people by Moses transmitted from a Divine Source on Mt. Sinai. It seems as if this direct transmission is saying you've got to do these things and you better not do these other things because that is what is commanded. They are even presented twice, with slightly different wording, within the Torah to accent their importance. Personally, I have found that by studying both the Ten Commandments and the Eight Limbs of Yogas with a perspective that creates more questions than answers, it provides me with tools to reflect on what is cultivating my own peace and what is causing my peace to be disturbed. Instead of seeing any scriptural text as a finite set of guidelines with the subtext of, "do these things and do not do these other things because...well, just because!" it cultivates a perspective that contains a more common sense path to a peaceful mind and a joyful life. I encourage you in your own studies to look at the two basic lists of ten concepts, compare them, look for similarities, see what they both contain that are similar, what one contains that the other does not, and, most of all, what is the most basic way it will contribute to your own practice of cultivating a peaceful mind.

All of the links from Yoga in the Jewish World: <http://okay.kiddingaroundyoga.com/module-1/yoga-jewish-world/>