

“Yoga-Nish”; A Shabbat and Yoga Experience For Body, Mind and Nishama

Second Saturday of each month, beginning September 8, 2018 at B’nai Israel

10:15am-11:45am (Optional Kiddush Lunch to follow. There is no fee and all are welcome.)

In this program of rest, learning, and renewal, we will use the practice of Yoga and the essence of Judaism to merge individual consciousness with universal consciousness for a graceful Shabbat experience, signifying unity, peace, and freedom.

This enriching and empowering program is delivered through the vehicles of gentle yoga, meditation, story, wisdom, and chant. The weekly Torah portion inspires the theme for each class as an anchor for our focus and attention, and enriching and embodying its wisdom within our daily life.

Shabbat, an ancient Jewish weekly celebration, is a sacred period of respite, a time to step back from the way things are during the rest of the week, in order to envision the way we would like them to be for ourselves, our relationships, our work and our world.

Aryeh Kaplan in his book *Jewish Meditation*, describes the four steps demonstrated in the traditional Jewish service: Action, Speech, Thought, and Nothingness. These steps are similar to those outlined in Patanjali’s eight limbs of yoga and provide us with points of connection and exploration to inform an embodied experience.

“Yoga-Nish” is an opportunity to access this state that moves us beyond our ordinary perception to a glimpse of the world beyond ordinary perception, which opens a portal for us to observe these steps daily. Both the Torah and Patanjali state, that it is by stepping away from our everyday lives and purifying our senses, that clarity is accessed with deeper connection to the divine.

What does it mean to move ourselves beyond the world we live in? To step back from things the way they are? And what does yoga, meditation, story and chant have to do with Judaism and Shabbat?

In preparing for each weekly session, Chaya draws insight from the weekly Torah portion to create an embodied and purposeful class. Through focused attention on the weekly portion we are uniting with Jews around the world who are studying the same portion and deriving meaning and inspiration from it. Through weaving this insight into our practice we are weaving ourselves closer to each other, to G-d and to the spiritual dimension, as well as relating it to how we live today and how we can grow beyond who we already are (which is what the Torah asks us to do).

This is not a Torah study group, but rather a Torah inspired class to form meaningful intentions that connect us through the weekly portion, movement and breath. There are several insights that can be drawn from each weekly portion, and the insights we receive blossom, clarify and evolve us as we practice and move deeper into the spiritual dimension, an opportunity to

cultivate fresh insight, allowing you to ultimately stretch beyond previous experiences to unlock higher potential.

Judaism is a practice, and without that there is just an inheritance of Judaism, or a going through the motions, or better yet, for some, have someone else go through the motions for them. What does it mean to practice? Practice is something that moves us to the divine spiritual dimension, through integration of the levels of who we are and observing our relationships to ourselves and our environment. This is the essence of Yoga practice and Jewish practice. How do we do that?

Let's elaborate further on the 4 steps Aryeh Kaplan discusses in his book *Jewish Meditation* and how and why they make up our traditional service, yoga and our own "Yoga-Nish" class. They are a mirror for our daily life and a doorway to sacredness and deeper spiritual attunement. The first step is that of Action, where we are first attuning to our body, and we are still involved in our body and can use tools of yoga such as body scanning and the combining of breath and movement. It is not the specific movement that is most important but the attuning to breath and sensation to deepen our awareness of it, moving in ways that are appropriate and accessible for each person. It is through the body that we are able to receive the blessings and gifts of creation from G-d, and through which we receive sensations which are also gifts to teach us about our relationships to ourselves and our environment. This is reflected in the first part of the traditional service, where we acknowledge the sacredness of our body and the sacrificial system of offerings made to G-d.

The second is Speech and becoming aware of how we are communicating with the divine. Speech is the bridge through which we integrate our physical and spiritual nature and our relationship to G-d. Speech is also connected to the breath, which is a vehicle of deeper consciousness. We practice breathing techniques, Hebrew mantra, and chanting, and pay attention to the subtleties of breath, and the articulation of words. Through the absorption of the vibration of an ancient, and spiritual language such as Hebrew, communication is happening. In the traditional service this is done through our psalms and praises of G-d.

Then the level of Thought is where we grasp the power of the divine. Thought is the hand that holds the divine experience. As we focus our attention on the divine, we become quiet and still, the nervous system becomes balanced and calm, the voice of clear insight emerges and then we listen and observe our relationship to ourselves and our environment. In the traditional service the level of Thought includes the *Shema*, that tells us to listen, and its blessings which tell us how to serve G-d. All thought can be filled with G-d's Unity and Love, yet the Spiritual is still absent when in pure thought. Thought can move us into deeper intimacy with G-d, but we are still oblivious to the sea of spirituality around us.

The level above thought is Nothingness. When thought is turned off it is the ineffable experience of the divine. The realm of pure experience is beyond thought. When we arrive at a state of meditation, we enter into a realm that transcends thought which is a more expanded level of consciousness. We are not reading words on a page, or thinking about the words,

rather we are experiencing them. This is the highest level of the soul called *Chaya*, which means awareness of the divine, or life force. The *Amidah*, which is the oldest Jewish meditation, is still kept as a meditation in the traditional service.

Kaplan goes on to say that this is where most other traditions stop and where Judaism (and Yoga) go beyond. In the Torah it says that for Jews this level of practice is still not enough and in Yoga it is not enough to have *satva*. It is not enough to just have the spiritual experience. We must also have appropriate action, *rajas*, and bring our experience into our life daily for profound spiritual effects and this level of practice, Kaplan named the *Descent of Influx*. It is through the observance of Shabbat, the stepping away from our lives as they are the rest of the week, which creates the space and opportunity for deeper connection to the divine. This is what refreshes and renews our faith and gives us the energy for integration, transmutation of energy and experience, and thus transcending us from ordinary to beyond ordinary perception and experience, to know life extraordinarily. By stepping back from things the way we know them to be, withdrawing our senses and mind from regular activities, we receive a glimpse of our true selves and the world as it is. These are the tools and technology of Yoga and the Practice of Judaism.

Lead by Chaya~Sharon Heller, BA, CAP, C-IAYT, and LMT, who is a Holistic Lifestyle Educator and Health Coach, Ayurvedic Practitioner, and Yoga and Massage Therapist, who works with purpose driven groups and individuals to facilitate health and well-being. She maintains a private practice in Gainesville, where she specializes in lifestyle balancing techniques that include Ayurveda, Nutrition, Massage, Yoga Therapy, Stress Reduction and awakening the human spirit, Transformative Wellness Programs and Professional trainings. She is the author of *Yoga of Action; Adaptive Lifestyle and Holistic Health for People with Disabilities*, featured in *Kripalu Yoga On and Off The Mat*, and *Yoga International Magazine*, and is a national program presenter garnering prodigious testimonials for her life changing work. www.ChayaVeda.com