

By referring back to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras – The Yamas and Niyamas – The first two limbs from the Raja's Yoga eight limbed path, and considering how they fit into our practice at Christmas can help us have a fulfilled, contented and yogic time.

Yamas *Refer to social discipline or restraints*

Ahimsa - NON HARMING - Consider the social and economic ethics behind your festive offerings this Christmas. Avoid buying children's toys which denote violence and gifts which have been transported half-way across the world which causes an impact on global warming. Instead look for sustainable locally created products which have been crafted with a sense of love, peace and joy.

Satya - TRUTHFULNESS - Remaining truthful to yourself can induce feelings of inner peace and love, (which is in itself the spirit of Christmas), however holding onto this amid the swirl of Christmas demands can be a challenge. Do what feels right for you in your heart, yet be aware of not harming others, remember Ahimsa, through your words, thoughts or actions.

In your practice focus on grounding yourself, connecting to your core and listening to your heart.

Asteya - NON STEALING - Reduce the burden on the environment this Christmas by finding ways to give back to Mother Earth and instil sustainability through your choices. Look for sustainable living, earth friendly products. Give back to the earth by re-potting your Christmas tree or after the festivities use it to create chip and mulch. Alternatively choose a live potted tree or buy one from communities which give back to Mother Earth by planting other trees.

Brahmacharya - MODERATION - Avoid excesses in all areas. Seek balance, harmony and peace in all areas of your Christmas! Avoid indulging at Christmas dinner, eating that extra chocolate that you don't need and fulfilling those gift wish lists which are in excess. Ask yourself: do we really need more?

Aparigraha - NON POSSESSIVENESS - Abstain from greediness, hoarding or possessing beyond one's needs and encourage others to do the same. There are some wonderful gifts of ethically alternative, unwrapped charity gifts available. Discourage wish lists and encourage re-gifting, passing on gifts that you no longer need, to someone else who may need it. Be mindful though of not upsetting the original gift giver.

Niyamas *Individual discipline or observances*

Saucha - PURITY - This is thought to refer to the state of our heart, mind, body and surroundings by acting with the intention of compassion in all that we do. Be clear in your heart of your intentions this Christmas, through what you eat, think and do. Seek out locally grown, seasonal, organic fresh produce and planet-friendly, free-range dairy and meat products where possible.

Santosh - CONTENTMENT - Feeling contented in that we do, think, are and have. By enjoying the simple pleasures of Christmas; being surrounded by loved ones, connecting with others, by aligning with nature and our beliefs we can find inner peace and feel contentment in our hearts.

Tapas - AUSTERITY - Austerity teaches us self-discipline and can be particularly challenging at Christmas when we are surrounded by social and commercial pressures. This is our practice, having the strength to not be affected by what's happening around us at Christmas. What we need to ask ourselves is "do I really need to clutter my life with unnecessary gifts", "have that extra piece of Christmas pudding" or "celebrate in excess at parties?"

Swadhyaya - SELF-STUDY/SELF-OBSERVATION - Christmas connects us to our deepest feelings, it evokes emotions of love and connection as we gather with friends and family it is a celebration of our heart, as we open up to the act of giving and receiving, however it can be a difficult time as we remember lost ones. Observe what arises for you this Christmas, what are you holding onto in you, in your body, mind and spirit, what are able to let go of, what gifts of your practice are you able to share with others?

Ishvara Pranidhana - SURRENDER TO THE ENERGY OF THE UNIVERSE TO THE DIVINE - Through our practice of the Yamas and Niyamas we can experience a sense of trust and belief that life will take us, wherever we are meant to go. Being gracious, open and humble this festive season can only lead us on the path to have a fulfilled, contented and loving Yogic Christmas.

May you take the gifts of your yoga mat into your Christmas, sharing them generously with everyone you meet on your path, as you allow the light from your heart to continuously shine.