

# Perceptions of wondering Awe in yoga practitioners is related to a conscious lifestyle and are predicted best by the Niyamas as ethical principles

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## Background

To experience moments of wondering Awe with subsequent feelings of gratitude is a perceptive aspect of spirituality.

A person's lifestyle and related spiritual practices may sensitize for these perceptions.



## Aim

Analyze feelings of Awe in yoga practitioners with respect to their conception of yoga (i.e., as gymnastics, conscious life style, spiritual path) and to their ethical principles of yoga (Yama/Niyama; Figure 1) as these may indicate the underlying 'aim' of their yoga practice.

## Methods

Cross-sectional survey among 826 yoga practitioners (89% women, mean age 49 ± 10 years) with standardized instruments, i.e. *Yama/Niyama Questionnaire* (YaNiQ), *Awe/Gratitude* (GrAw-7), wellbeing (WHO-5) Situational awareness / Mindfulness (CPSC).

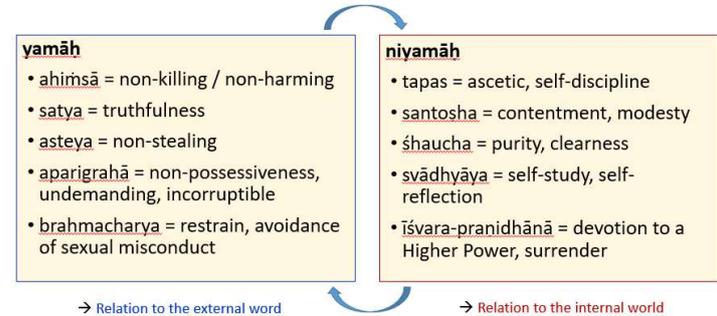
## Results

- Yoga practitioners' Awe/Gratitude (GrAw-7) scores were higher (75 ± 16) compared to a reference sample (65 ± 20).
  - Women scored significantly higher than men ( $p < .0001$ ; Cohen's  $d = .44$ ).
  - Awe was higher when the philosophical backgrounds of yoga were studied more frequently ( $F = 14.8, p < .0001$ ).
  - The stricter the vegetarian lifestyle, the higher the GrAw-7 scores ( $F = 5.3, p = 0.001$ )
- Yoga was seen as physical exercise by 26% and as a hobby by 35%, as a conscious life style by 91% and as a spiritual path by 78%.
  - When yoga is not seen as a spiritual path ( $F = 18.7, p < .0001$ ) and a conscious lifestyle ( $F = 9.6, p < .0001$ ), then Awe/Gratitude was significantly lower (Figure 2).
- Awe correlated moderately with the Yama/Niyama factors Santosha / Svadhyaya / Ishvara Pranidhana (SSIP:  $r = .49$ ) and Satya/Bramacharya/Tapah (SBT:  $r = .33$ ), and less with Aparigraha ( $r = .22$ ) or Ahimsa ( $r = .18$ ).
- Stepwise regression analyses revealed the Niyama factor SSIP is the best predictors of the GrAw-7 scores (Table 1).
- A further regression model including wellbeing and situational awareness revealed four significant predictors of Awe: the Niyama factor, wellbeing, female gender, and mindfulness (Table 2).

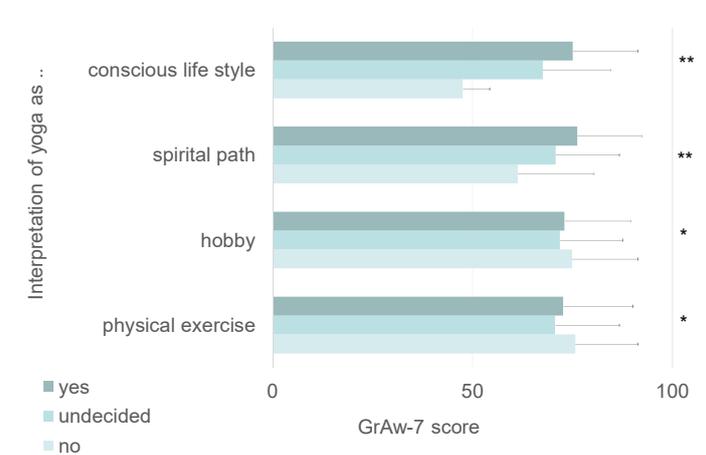
## Conclusions

- Yoga practitioners perceive moments of wondering Awe to a large extent, much larger as compared to a reference sample.
- The personal conception of yoga as a conscious (spiritual) lifestyle with subsequent behaviors seems to sensitize for these perceptions. Following the Niyamas (Contentment / Self-Reflection / Devotion and Surrender) was thus the best predictor of yoga practitioners' ability to perceive Awe/Gratitude in their life.

**Figure 1:** Ethical Principles of Yoga: Yama / Niyama according to the Patanjali Yoga Sutra 2.30 and 2.32



**Figure 2:** Awe/Gratitude related to the interpretations of yoga (\*\* $p < 0.0001$ ; \* $p < 0.01$ ; ANOVA)



**Table 1:** Regression analyses with Awe/Gratitude as dependent variable and yoga related influencing variables

Dependent variable Awe/Gratitude			
Modell 2: $F = 128.4, p < 0.0001; R^2 = .26$			
	Beta	T	p
2 (constant)		10.213	<.0001
Contentment / Self-Reflection / Devotion and Surrender (SSIP)	.482	15.283	<.0001
Male gender	-.162	-5.153	<.0001

Not significant in the regression model: Frequency of studying the philosophical background of yoga, yoga as a spiritual path, yoga as a conscious life style, Truthfulness / Restrain / Self-Discipline (SBT)

**Table 2:** Regression analyses with Awe/Gratitude as dependent variable and yoga related and additionally wellbeing related influencing variables

Dependent variable Awe/Gratitude			
Modell 4: $F = 86.6, p < 0.0001; R^2 = .32$			
	Beta	T	p
4 (constant)		9.551	<.0001
Contentment / Self-Reflection / Devotion and Surrender (SSIP)	.282	6.902	<.0001
Wellbeing (WHO-5)	.188	5.287	<.0001
Male gender	-.180	-5.934	<.0001
Situational awareness / Mindfulness (CPSC)	.179	4.156	<.0001

Not significant in the regression model: Frequency of studying the philosophical background of yoga, yoga as a spiritual path, yoga as a conscious life style, Truthfulness / Restrain / Self-Discipline (SBT)