



The Kasher Sutras

Marcus J. Freed

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55 videos available, one for each chapter of The Kasher Sutras

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvq4KocXSAUV-yKIFQgCbz4BhJiGRuID1>

Review by Linda Zucker. To be published in *The Independent Scholar* (2016, forthcoming)

Yoga today, particularly as it is taught in the West, seems a far cry from its origins in Vedic tradition. As a yoga teacher, I often struggle with the concept of cultural appropriation and how it presents itself in my teaching and practice. When I saw *The Kasher Sutras* – just the title of the book – I felt a great deal of skepticism and wondered whether Marcus J. Freed’s text is another in a long line of Western attempts to claim yoga under a different set of beliefs and roots, particularly those that are Abrahamic in origin. Abrahamic traditions, such as the Jewish ones presented in *The Kasher Sutras*, often prohibit worshipping more than one god and thus a potential conflict arises when exploring yoga in its modern roots, interconnected with the multi-theistic Hindu belief system. However Freed does address this concern, noting that the practice of yoga as a way of moving one’s body is older than modern Hindu beliefs. He also seems to be clear in the introduction of his intentions, which is to help align yoga and movement with Western (Abrahamic) beliefs.

The book is structured in a similar fashion to Pantajali’s *Yoga Sutras* but also mirrors the *parashat*, or weekly Jewish study of the Hebrew Bible. For the purpose of this review, I read the book cover to cover, including the Bibliyoga Poses (Freed’s version of

asanas). This book could also be used to spend a week on each sutra, meditating on the teachings and deepening one’s physical connection through building a yoga practice, using Freed’s step-by-step instructions as a guide. [A note on the latter possibility: building an at-home yoga sequence that is suited to your body’s needs takes knowledge and practice, so doing some additional research and working with a local yoga teacher may help if you are a complete beginner.]

One aspect of the book that stands out is Freed’s thoughtful yet humorous approach to communicating. *The Kasher Sutras* draws on the wisdom of the *Torah*, *Baghavad Gita*, *The Yoga Sutras*, human experience and even pop culture. The format of each Sutra is the Title/Kasher Sutra/Soul Solution/Bibliyoga Pose/Body Benefit, followed by a brief narrative that engages the reader’s heart and mind. He links yogic principles to Hebrew healing philosophy and helps guide the reader through the actual mechanics and benefits of each pose that goes with the week’s *Sutra*.

In one Sutra, Freed introduces readers to the concept of the *yamas* and the *niyamas*, which he summarizes as the codes for moral behavior. In this same Sutra, he challenges us to stop holding ourselves back, while

managing to drive home this point by quoting *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Freed's insight and ability to connect ancient traditions for a modern audience may also help *The Kosher Sutras* resonate with seekers from non-Abrahamic belief systems.

I appreciate that Freed honors the Vedic origins of the *asanas* by using the Sanskrit name (along with the English translation), as opposed to renaming all of the *asanas* to be more acceptable to monotheistic audiences, as some other practitioners have done. One exception to this is *Savasana*, which Freed renames Shabbat Pose. However, the apparent reason for the renaming seems to be to capture the essence of a notion of "resting and rejuvenating," something that many of us overlook in our daily lives. Freed shares Shabbat Pose in various Sutras, but the one that particularly resonated with me is the **The Law of 7: Rest, Recuperate, Re-Engage/Behar-Behukotai** on page 108. The Soul Solution, "Create a powerful and sustainable future," spoke to me on so many levels. While I tend to think of the book of Leviticus as one large list of "do not do this..." items, I was pleasantly surprised to be reminded that it isn't just about what not to do. The seven-year cycle of rest for the land mentioned in Leviticus points at not just an agricultural practice for ancient Hebrews according to Freed, but also a path to ethical living. Allowing time for rest enables us to give way for restoration, as well. On a personal note, I have had challenges establishing boundaries between life and work and have bought into the cultural ideals of sleep deprivation Freed speaks of (even as I write this review) but feel inspired to shift my actions to create healthier, new patterns.

In the Bibliyoga Poses section of the book, Freed demonstrates the various *asanas* that are mentioned in the text. Right at the beginning, there is a disclosure about some health challenges Freed faced that impacted his ability to do some of the poses in the way he might have liked to, but he uses this as an opportunity to essentially ask us to be gentle with ourselves. Yoga is a journey rather than a destination and Freed openly exemplifies this, which is one of the hallmarks of a good teacher. Freed provides step-by-step instructions on the poses and in most cases, offers modifications and variations for injured or advanced students. This information can be complicated in some yoga books and again, Freed finds a way to be succinct that doesn't sacrifice safety.

If you are a seeker of wisdom from different traditions, curious about Jewish beliefs or looking for a way to integrate physical movement into your spiritual practice, it is quite likely that *The Kosher Sutras* will provide knowledge, experience and perhaps even expansive healing, and are open to it.

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