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December 6, 2010

About Us

- Articles
- Alternative Therapies
- Apologetics
- Deception
- Doctrine
- Evolution
- Freemasonry
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Martial Arts
- Mormons
- Gold Plated Mormon
- New Age
- Occult
- Other Groups
- Quarterly Newsletter
- Related Issues
- Testimony
- World Religions

Discussion Forum

Downloads

FAQs

- About Beliefs
- About Reachout

Links

Meetings Diary

Shop



Alternative Therapies: Yoga

01.01.2004

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Yoga by its own definition seeks to bring us into union with an impersonal force that it calls God. It has a number of assumptions that are different to the belief of evangelical Christians.

Yoga works on the basis that man is basically good. Yoga claims to be the way to oneness with God (Salvation). Yoga is about self-realisation. Yoga encourages worship of a guru-god-man.

When you get involved in the exercises and meditation of Yoga we believe you are opening yourself up to a supernatural force that is different to the Spirit that comes from the God of evangelical Christians.

For a more detailed look at the subject press here

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[About Us](#)[Articles](#)[Alternative Therapies](#)[Apologetics](#)[Deception](#)[Doctrine](#)[Evolution](#)[Freemasonry](#)[Jehovah's Witnesses](#)[Martial Arts](#)[Mormons](#)[Gold Plated Mormon](#)[New Age](#)[Occult](#)[Other Groups](#)[Quarterly Newsletter](#)[Related Issues](#)[Testimony](#)[World Religions](#)[Discussion Forum](#)[Downloads](#)[FAQs](#)[About Beliefs](#)[About Reachout](#)[Links](#)[Meetings Diary](#)[Shop](#)

Alternative Therapies: Yoga - 2

01.01.2004

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Is yoga compatible with evangelical Christianity

In these notes we are not asking if those who practice Yoga are nice people. Nor are we asking if they are genuine, nor even if Yoga works. We are asking, what are the roots of Yoga and are they compatible with evangelical Christianity?

There are many varieties of Yoga, which date back to the origin of the practice hundreds of years ago. However, much of what we experience in Britain has been 'westernised' or 'christianised' to make it more palatable. What we see and experience today are the 'branches' but surely they cannot be removed from the roots? The power of Yoga comes from its roots and just what are they?.

What are the roots of Yoga?

Yoga is the path to enlightenment in Hinduism. Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word yuj meaning 'to unite', and therefore it means "union with God." The meaning of the word shows the goal of Yoga and this is borne out in several ways.

Swami Vishnudevanda, an expert in Yoga and author of the book *'The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga'* is quoted as saying:

"The aim of all Yoga practice is to achieve truth wherein the individual soul identifies with the supreme soul of God."

Other definitions include:

"Yoga is the means by which finite man seeks union with Infinite 'Being" - that is, God.

"Union - science of uniting the individual soul with the Cosmic Spirit" - Autobiography of a Yogi, Paramahansa Yogananda

There are four main types of Yoga, four different main pathways to the same goal.

Bhakti Yoga - the way of devotion. First, this will include seeking to detach yourself from material things that are only illusion (Maya). Second, you must positively devote yourself to a guru or godman being the personal form of the impersonal god.

Karma Yoga - the way of service. This will include pilgrimages, good works etc. The karma yogi will go about his everyday life with no aim or expectation of self-gratification. In this detached state his actions are no longer his own and therefore karma - the result of ones own actions - no longer affects him.

Jnana Yoga - the way of knowledge. This leads the yogi into a life of concentration and learning of the Hindu scriptures.

Raja Yoga - the way of contemplation. This is called the royal way and is the way of deep meditation.

Some also teach that there are eight stages in the path to enlightenment.

1. Body purification
2. Postures
3. Postures to produce psychic energy
4. Breath control
5. Stilling the mind
6. Concentration
7. Meditation
8. Union with God (shiva)

The main form of Yoga in the west is Hatha Yoga, a division of Raja Yoga. But is Hatha Yoga just about keep fit exercises, breathing etc?

Having laid this foundation let us make a few clear statements and check for their compatibility with Scripture.

Yoga brings us into union with an impersonal force god

The god of Hinduism by definition is an impersonal force and so immediately we are at odds with the personal Creator God that evangelical Christians see within the Bible.

Most Yogis will not throw the Bible away completely but will redefine it.

Today we hear phrases such as the source within or the ki that leads us back to our impersonal



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incompatible with evangelical Christianity.

Yoga is the way to come to oneness with god (salvation)

Despite many attempts to show otherwise, nowhere in the Bible do we find Yoga mentioned as a means of Salvation or of coming to know God. What then of those who have had supernatural experiences have they not met with 'god'?

There are two supernatural forces, one being the counterfeit, and we need to check carefully to see where the power we experience comes from. Would God give power to something that is clearly against the teaching He has given? We must answer this logically and not emotionally.

Words such as 'praying' may be used in a Yoga class, but what does that mean? Are you really praying to God? Look at [John 14:6](#), [3:16](#) and [2 Corinthians 11:3-4](#), [13-15](#) among many other verses to see that on this point Yoga again is incompatible with evangelical Christianity.

Yoga is all about self-realisation

The aim of Yoga is to bring the inner 'self' to the front, to make it stronger and exert itself. However the Biblical picture is the opposite. Many who have been involved with Yoga in the past testify to this area of self as very strong.

[Matthew 16:24-26](#) and [Galatians 2:20](#) show Yoga as again being incompatible with evangelical Christianity because of its emphasis on self.

Yoga encourages worship of the Guru - god-man

In some forms of Yoga today this is still clear. The one man is above all the rest, he has finished his cycle of incarnations and is now 'god'. Many Gurus claim to be god and many followers are seeking to be like god. They want to release the power within that will give them control over their life.

We may feel that we are able to end up with some control over our lives now but we have no control over our future life. Are there really many gods and can we be in control of our own destiny?

Evangelical Christians see within the Bible that there is One God and we can never be gods. The One personal creator God of Scripture, alone has the power to decide on life and death issues, see [Hebrews 9:27](#) and [Matthew 10:28](#)

Conclusion

The conclusion that we must come to is overwhelmingly that Yoga and evangelical Christianity are incompatible. At very best in Yoga you are basing your hope on man's ideas that can never deliver in fullness what is promised. At worse you have tapped into a power that is not from the one true God as described above.

More detailed information is available in booklet form

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Alternative Therapies: Four Main Reasons Why I No Longer Practice Hatha Yoga



06.09.2005

[Printer Friendly File](#)**Author: Mike Shreve**

Over the Internet and in the worship gatherings I conduct throughout the U.S. and the world, I am often asked the question, "Is it acceptable for a Christian to practice HATHA YOGA?"

I will attempt to answer concisely in the following article, with a few preparatory statements. I understand that some of you may disagree with my conclusions, but please be patient with me and read the entire article before you arrive at a conclusion. What I share below is spoken in great love and respect-even for those who may believe differently than me.

MY SPIRITUAL RESUME

First, some background information. I taught Kundalini Yoga at four universities in Florida in 1970, with several hundred students attending my classes. I studied personally under a guru named Yogi Bhajan and ran a yoga ashram myself. Each day was consumed with spiritual disciplines: from 3:30 AM to 9 PM. In my classes, I incorporated many Hatha Yoga techniques. Kundalini Yoga claims to be an amalgamation of many types of yogas and a blending of the best benefits from all types, including Hatha. However, since my conversion to Christianity in the fall of 1970, I have never practised Hatha or any other kind of yoga. Some practitioners would disagree with me, claiming that Hatha Yoga can be disassociated from its Far Eastern mystical roots and presented as an excellent, non-religious exercise regimen. That may be remotely possible, but it is certainly not what usually happens. I believe after you read the "Four Reasons" I present below, you will conclude, just as I have, that Christianity and yoga are incompatible.

THE REASON BEHIND EASTERN INFLUENCE

There is a major trend in our eclectic Western society that is gaining momentum, a departure from our Judeo-Christian roots (quite often because people have become disenchanted with a powerless expression of Christianity) and a turn to the Far East for concepts and practices that many hope will improve the health and state of their body, mind and soul. One of the chief indicators of this trend is the rise of interest in yoga. It should be mentioned that when the word "yoga" is used (a word meaning "yoke" or "union"), the majority of Westerners relate it only to Hatha Yoga, usually because they are unfamiliar with the deeper levels of practice and philosophical teachings.

Hatha Yoga is actually one of the simplest, foundational styles of yoga. It appears, on the surface, to be merely a highly developed exercise regimen. What could be wrong with just stretching, twisting, bending, breathing, sweating it out and getting the body in shape, regardless of the method used? Absolutely nothing-unless one or more of the following four negatives in present in your "yoga" experience:

Spiritual Roots

Hatha Yoga is based on a Far Eastern view of the spiritual, as well as physical, makeup of the body. The exercises having been created to allegedly 'open up the chakras.' These seven chakras, according to yogic lore, are spiritual energy centres in the body. Through these the kundalini (the latent 'serpent power' coiled at the base of the spine) passes as a person evolves toward enlightenment. Each "chakra" is also associated with a certain Hindu deity (which I contend are all non-existent, the product of human imagination).

Practitioners may have no knowledge of these things, but ignorance does not necessarily sanctify or purify the system from its association with spiritual falsehood. For those who believe in one God (to the exclusion of all humanly manufactured gods) anything associated with the worship of false deities must be considered idolatrous and unacceptable. Furthermore, it is taught that out-of-body experiences are attained by exiting the body through the 'chakras,' especially the third eye or the crown chakra. Hatha Yoga allegedly prepares one for these kinds of experiences. No promises like this are attached to aerobics, isometrics, weight lifting, jogging or other methods of exercising. If these out-of-body experiences were legitimate, leading a person to a real relationship with God, there would be no problem. However, I discovered the opposite to be true in my life. I definitely came under demonic influence.

Hatha Yoga is the third stage in Patanjali's (1) eight stage plan toward enlightenment (*Samadhi*). The first two stages are *Yama* (restraint) and *Niyama* (observance, devotion). In *The Book of the*

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According to the Bible, the presence of God can only be accessed through the soul being washed in the blood of Jesus and a person being "born again." This regenerative experience definitely leads one to a 'higher state of consciousness' (a conscious awareness of the reality of God) but it is totally different than anything offered through Eastern religions. Biblical salvation is not the result of some "serpent power" travelling up through the spine from within; it is the result of the power of the Holy Spirit entering INTO a repentant person from WITHOUT. So the contrast of these two approaches to spirituality actually reveals two very different views of God in His relationship with creation (Pantheism versus Theism).

The "serpent power" unleashed in meditation is not the power of the Holy Spirit, nor is it merely the latent power of the soul-it is a power that even gurus admit can be, at times, very destructive to the yoga practitioner. So where does this power come from that can potentially be so dangerous? It should help the inquisitive reader to see that there is absolutely NO account of anyone in the Bible being harmed who was filled with the true Holy Spirit (symbolised by a dove-a harmless creature). But there are undeniable accounts of insanity or dark occultic powers being the by-product of an encounter with this power likened to a serpent (a creature which can be quite harmful). Belief in this power is the 'root' of yoga system of thought, and if we are going to live free from deception, we must inspect the 'root' of Hatha Yoga practices, and not be merely concerned with the 'fruit' of a body that gets in better shape. (See the following articles: "What really is 'the kundalini'?" and "My Spiritual Journey.") Some Hatha Yoga poses are actually worship poses (like the "Sun Salutation"). We should remind ourselves that one of the commandments is: "I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before Me."

Spiritual Transfer

Though I was unaware of it at the time, when I studied yoga I came under a spiritual power or influence that was not the true power of God. This passed to me from the guru under whom I studied. (Under certain conditions, this 'consciousness-raising transference,' that many devotees seek after, is called *Shaktipat*).

Though I did not recognise it at the time, when I had out-of-body experiences, the source of the power was not the Holy Spirit. I was actually penetrating a spiritual realm just beyond this natural realm-a higher sphere that Jesus taught is dominated by powers subservient to the Prince of Darkness. The Bible even warns that the Prince of Darkness can appear as an angel of light and can grant counterfeit experiences of spiritual realities.

There are many sweet, gracious, kind and compassionate people studying yoga who would never purposefully seek to come under the influence of dark, deceptive, demonic powers. Most are genuinely seeking for truth, for Ultimate Reality. Some are seeking for no more than just to shape up their bodies. Because of this, in some cases, it is possible to go to a Hatha Yoga class and never be introduced to any kind of false spiritual 'power': if all the participants are only into the physical aspect or if all participants are Christian believers with a pure doctrinal stance. However, if the teacher of the class is involved in the philosophy behind the entire yogic system, there will be a subliminal spiritual transference from the teacher to the student that is probably not the true Spirit of God and can be very misleading. Those who are weak in their Christian faith can have their belief-system eroded over a period of time and end up being drawn into the Far Eastern mystical point of view.

Spiritual Intrigue

Even if the Hatha Yoga class atmosphere is relatively harmless, there is normally an arousal of curiosity on the part of those involved to learn more about the whole system of thought. I recently visited a Hatha Yoga Centre where I met a teacher, a gracious young man who claimed to be a Christian, yet all around the studio were magazines, books and videos that plainly teach the Far Eastern worldview (which is non-biblical in many ways). Almost any person attending would inevitably be drawn to look at these books, magazines and tapes and become intrigued about other aspects of yoga. So the Hatha Yoga becomes the 'bait' to carry people into a vast belief system that involves much more than physical exercise.

Spiritual Endorsement

Just suppose everything is relatively benign in a yoga class, that no one promotes Far Eastern philosophy, that all the teachers are Christians, and even Christian music is played, etc. Is there still a negative? MAYBE AND MAYBE NOT! If a Christian goes to classes (that may have NO spiritual emphasis whatsoever), still, a signal is going out to others that could easily be misinterpreted. Those who see Bible believers participating in Hatha Yoga classes could easily construe it to be an endorsement for the whole system of thought-unless a clear, definitive line is drawn-especially by those teaching the classes. This issue is very similar to Paul's admonition to early Christians not to eat meat offered to idols. He said that the idol didn't really exist and certainly the people needed food, so eating it would be all right, BUT weak Christians or non-believers might interpret such an act as an endorsement of idolatrous practices. (Read all of 1 Corinthians 8.) For this reason, Paul asserted, lest he become a stumbling block to a spiritually weak person-"I will never eat meat again." It makes logical sense that our final conclusion should be just as strong in this particular practice.

In conclusion, let me say that I am sure I will never do Hatha Yoga again. However, because I believe the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, I still exercise-but with a regimen that has no roots in false religions. Christian yoga is an oxymoron. There are just too many negatives and

too many areas of spiritual seduction and danger. I know some of you may disagree but what do you think? If you are doing yoga, I hope your response sounds something like: "Guess it's time to break out the old jogging shoes. Treadmill and racket ball court, here I come!"

(1) Patanjali was the writer of the Yoga Sutras, a categorisation of yogic thought arranged in four volumes. The first three were apparently written, some say, around the 2nd century BC and have become the foundation for most yogic teaching since. Yoga is one of the six orthodox systems of Indian (Hindu) thought.

(2) Virender Kumar Arya, The Book of the Vedas, Timeless Wisdom from Indian Tradition (Hauppauge, New York, Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 2003) p. 76 (emphasis by author of this article)

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