

THE TRUTH ABOUT YOGA



Yoga has been popular in the West for some time, and seems to be gaining in popularity. Hatha Yoga classes are being offered in dance studios, hospitals, and schools. Some schools offer a “yoga break”. It is also being taught in Catholic parishes. It appeals to Americans because it offers stretching exercises as well as meditations that calm the mind. Let’s take a closer look at yoga.

What is yoga?

Webster’s Library Dictionary gives a clear definition of yoga. It states , “**Yoga is a system of Hindu philosophy, strict spiritual discipline practiced to gain control over the forces of one’s being to gain occult powers but chiefly to attain union with the Deity or Universal Spirit.**” The truth is that yoga is part of the Hindu religion. It means “union with god or yoke with god.” The goal of Hinduism is to discover your True Self, which is god or Braham. How do they discover this True Self or god-self? They view yoga as a path to this discovery of the True Self or god-realization, and they use physical exercise, meditations, and mantras to attain it. Hindu literature states, “The sage yoked in yoga soon attains the Absolute (braham)” (Bhagavad-Gita V.6) Taken from *The Shambhala Guide to Yoga* by Georg Feuerstein p. vii)

Do these ideas contradict Christian belief?

Yes. Hindus believe in reincarnation (many lives) and karma. Through the practice of yoga, the Hindu strives to free himself from the bondage of karma which is the law of cause and effect which burdens the soul with the effects of sin and keeps it tied with the cycle of rebirth. As Christians, we know that Christ redeemed us by his death, and we die only once as the scriptures state in Hebrews 9:27. We know we are judged by our God at our death. We know him to be a personal God who created us, loves us, and forgives us. He is a God who hears our prayers, and answers them according to His timing and His Divine will. The Hindu believes that he will eventually become god or Braham, like a raindrop into an ocean..

What are the different types of yoga?

Johnnette Benkovic describes the four most popular forms of yoga in her book, *The New Age Counterfeit*, p. 11. They are as follows:

Hatha Yoga: salvation through physical exercise – physical manipulation of one’s body to create an altered state of consciousness which occurs as a result of the effect of the exercise on the central nervous system.

Japa Yoga: the “mechanical” path to salvation – the repetitious use of mantra (sacred word), usually the name of a Hindu god or evil spirit. This creates a state whereby the mind is conscious but unaware of anything or any thought. This state is called pure consciousness or transcendental consciousness.

Kundalini Yoga: salvation through the serpent –Hinduism teaches at the base of the spine is a triangle in which lies the “Kundalini Shakti” (Serpent Power). It is usually dormant but when it is awakened it travels up the spine to the top of the head, passing through six psychic centers called “chakras”. As it passes through a chakra, one receives psychic experiences and powers. When it reaches the top chakra, supposedly, the power to perform miracles and achieve liberation is realized.

Tantra Yoga: salvation through sex. Tantra is the way of pleasure and indulgence.

Hatha Yoga is the most common type of yoga in the U.S. According to the *Shambhala Guide to Yoga* by Georg Feuerstein, p. 26, “The heart of Hatha-Yoga is unquestionably breath control (pranayama), and a variety of techniques are given to manipulate the body’s energy (prana) via the breath.” (Prana is believed by the Hindus to be the universal life force, god-force or energy force)

What does the Vatican teach about yoga?

The Vatican recently released a 62 page document called “*Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the Water of Life: A Christian Reflection on the New Age.*” It lists yoga as one of the traditions that flows into the New Age. (See #2.1) The document also states, “*Yoga, Zen, TM and tantric exercises lead to an experience of self-fulfillment or enlightenment*” according to New Ager. It adds that they believe that “*anything which can provoke an altered state of consciousness are believed to lead to unity and enlightenment*” (#2.3.4.1) The document goes on to say, “*It is therefore necessary to accurately identify those elements which belong to the New Age Movement, and which cannot be accepted by those who are faithful to Christ and his Church.*” (#4) Fr. Amorth, who is the Vatican exorcist, says “Yoga, Zen, and TM are unacceptable to Christians. Often these apparently innocent practices can bring about hallucinations and schizophrenic conditions.”

Can yoga be Christianized?

According to Clare Merkle, a former New Ager and Yogi Practitioner, there is no such thing as Christian yoga. Merkle states that “So called “Christianized” versions also increase risk by combining Christian belief and mystical practices that further open practitioners to misuse and spiritual ruin. Most common than crisis is a slow metamorphosis from the belief in Christ and the Church to the belief in spiritual perfection through self-realization, albeit only physical realization as paramount to spiritual health.” Also, the term “Christian Yoga” gives people the impression that it is harmless, which is not the case. (Clare Merkle has been appearing on EWTN network, on Johnette Benkovic’s show, “Living His Life Abundantly”. She is an expert on the New Age. She can be reached by e-mail at crossveil@go.com. For more detailed information on yoga, read her article “Yoga – Health or Stealth?” from her website which is crossveil.org.)

Is it harmless to do postures only?

According to Merkle, “The actual physical postures have occult significances and can trigger reactions just as the breathing and mind work do. They are add-ons that increase the effectiveness of the postures, which are technically not just stretching. We have nervous, endocrine, organ, neuro-skeletal and cognitive functions that are very delicate and interconnected. By manipulation of either some kind of occult or unknown power through the use of the will or intellect, or simply the stimulation through targeted exercise, this can and has caused some crisis in people.” When asked why people receive more energy and less fatigue while doing yoga, she responded “Yoga can give energy simply from stretching which increases circulation and muscle tone. But, it also works on the endocrine system. I knew a lady who did “power yoga” at work and stopped sleeping. When I asked what she was doing, she described a posture designed to ignite the pituitary gland through posture and pranayamic breathing which is designed to bring occult power to the gland. There are innumerable cases of people that experience what Easterners call a kundalini awakening – it feels like a fire hydrant of fire ascending the spine – side effects include sleeplessness, dissociation, seeing spirits, extraordinary powers or nervous breakdowns and collapse for years. I was just contacted by a person who is having what is called a kundalini break – (as I just described) This person has a being inside her that keeps pushing the body around, had to quit work and move in with someone. And this person cannot “stay in the body” as he/she describes it. I just referred this person to an exorcist. Just as Ouija is considered a parlor game at first, it can have immense ramifications. Yoga is a direct door to the occult. And the more spiritual or sensitive a person, the more possibility for experiencing things

more strongly. Also, whatever latent psychological weakness is present can be exacerbated. Psychotic breaks are not uncommon.” People who get involved in New Age/occult sometimes need deliverance from evil spirits, according to Fr. Amorth, the Vatican exorcist.

Did Pope John Paul II give warnings about dabbling in Eastern religions?

Yes. On November 16, 2003 *Our Sunday Visitor* published an article called “Is It Too Much of a Stretch?” by Marianna Bartholomew. Her article gave Vatican warnings about yoga and stated “The Church is calling Catholics to firm up their faith and consider whether New Age influences like those of yoga are subtly eroding their intimacy with God.” She quotes Pope John Paul II when he cautions “those Christians who enthusiastically welcome certain ideas originating in the religious traditions of the Far East” in his book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*.

How widespread is yoga practice in our Church?

In speaking of Christians, Merkle states “Many have become involved in one of the larger yoga societies or ashrams. Adding to the general confusion about the legitimacy of yoga is the guidance Christians receive from the now significant body of Catholic clergy, teachers and spiritual counselors who practice, write about and advocate Eastern practices, especially yoga, often mixing them with Catholic mysticism. (underline emphasis is mine) One Catholic rehabilitation center for religious I know of teaches yoga to those having already had nervous breakdowns.” Clare Merkle was introduced to yoga by a priest who was attending an ashram.

In summary, we need to be aware of these facts.

- 1) The Vatican document has identified
Yoga as New Age.
- 2) Yoga is a direct door to the occult.
- 3) The Vatican document states that New Age cannot be accepted by faithful Catholics

If we want to exercise, why not do aerobics, walking dancing, or swimming. In this way our bodies will benefit from these activities, and our spirits will not be subjected to any beliefs or practices which are contrary to our Christian faith.

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