

SHOULD CHRISTIANS DO 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 some of the different types of yoga?

Hatha Yoga is the most popular type of yoga in America and is thought to be exercise. In reality it is part of the Hindu religion. The Hindu believes that Hatha Yoga is salvation through physical exercise. It is the 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. The goal of Hatha Yoga is to awaken the kundalini-shakti, , according to *The Shambhala Guide to Yoga, p.26.* (This kundalini power is thought to be an occult power.) Hinduism teaches at the base of the spine is a triangle in which lies the “Kundalini Shakti” (Serpent Power). This serpent is believed to be the goddess Shakti. 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, it merges with the god Shiva, and supposedly the power to perform miracles and achieve liberation is realized. Hatha Yoga seeks to separate the body from the soul, through manipulation of the skeletal and muscle structure, in order to attain union with the Hindu version of god. I know a lady who had

a bad experience with yoga at age 16. She was doing a yoga exercise when suddenly her spirit came out of her body. This is the goal of yoga! They want to separate the soul from the body and attain union with Brahm, an impersonal god, and actually become Brahm.

There is also a posture which gives honor and salutation to the sun. They face the sun, repeating the twelve names of the Lord Sun! Other positions are named after gods or animals. This is clearly in contradiction to the Christian faith!

- Another type of yoga is called Raja Yoga, the path to Self-realization (realizing that you are god) through meditation and ecstasy. According to Swami Vishnudevanada, “Many people think that Hatha Yoga is merely physical exercise. But in reality there is no difference between Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga.” (*The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga*)

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 Agers. 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.”

Did Archbishop Rivera give warnings on yoga?

Yes. Archbishop Norberto Rivera, Archbishop of Mexico City, issued this statement about yoga. He said, “*Yoga is essentially a spiritual and bodily exercise that comes from Hindu spirituality. Its postures and exercises, though presented as only a method, are inseparable from their specific meaning within the context of Hinduism. Yoga is an introduction to a religious tradition alien to Christianity. The word “yoga” means “union” We would have to ask ourselves: union with what?*” (*Pastoral Instruction on the New Age* by Archbishop Norberto Rivera, p.31)

Can yoga be Christianized?

Moira Noonan, an expert on New Age, also gives warnings against yoga. Once a teacher of the occult and New Age, she is now a devout Catholic and author of the book, *Ransomed from Darkness*, available on Amazon.com. She has told her story on TBN, EWTN and radio stations worldwide. She says “Christians should not do yoga because yoga is part of a religious system that is not compatible with Judeo-Christianity and mixing the two is Syncretism and the Catholic Church warns against that. The yoga system is to reach an impersonal god-head through the manipulation of the physical body and the chakra energy centers that it teaches to attain enlightenment. This view is Gnostic. Christians do not inherently believe that the physical body is evil and that it will reincarnate many times to reach enlightenment. Reincarnation is a heresy that the Catholic Church has taught against in Scripture and the Catechism. To a Christian the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and will be resurrected with Our Lord in heaven. The Good News of resurrection is bad news to a yoga master whose ultimate goal is liberation from his body! Pilates is a form of exercise. The problem is usually the music in the studio. The music tends to be New Age or chants or something other than Christian. So while your body may be benefiting, what is your mind being programmed?” For further information, please visit her website, which is spiritbattleforsouls.org.

Is it harmless to do postures only?

According to people who have been harmed by yoga practices, the postures themselves have occult significances. The breathing and mind work are add-ons. The postures alone are designed to create altered levels of consciousness, plus they can trigger reactions just as the breathing and mind work do. It is a direct door to the occult. Some people who get involved in New Age or occult practices 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*. The Vatican also warned Catholics that Zen and yoga can “degenerate into a cult of the body” that debases Christian prayer. (*News Chronicle 12-13-89*)

How widespread is yoga practice in our Church?

Unfortunately, we now have a significant body of Catholic clergy, teachers and spiritual counselors who practice, write about and advocate Eastern practices, especially yoga. They often mix them with Catholic mysticism. This makes these practices appear legitimate, thereby causing added confusion among the laity.

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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