**Is Yoga Religious?**

 Yoga classes are popular across western countries, and even in YMCA’s and YWCA’s. I heard of one library that had many brochures recommending yoga classes, but they would not allow Christian brochures because they were religious. Apparently many are not aware of either the religious origins of yoga or the religious purposes.

“If you are used to thinking in terms of one world, one life, one god, then to think of there beings many worlds, many lives, or many gods, will seem unreasonable, but man’s real identity is far more extensive than his reason can comprehend.” Text is quoted from the <http://www.hathayogalesson.com/> web page under reincarnation.

**Do People Claim Yoga is Spiritual?**

Yes they do. The web site DoYoga.com advertises the book “The Heart of the Yogi that lays out philosophical and spiritual context of hatha yoga from the Vedas to the Tantra.”

The web pages for the 4th Annual YogaVision Conference in Arizona says, “In the Buddhist tradition, the Sangha is the keeper of the Dharma: The Sankrit [sp] root ‘dhr’ upon which Dharma is based means to uphold or support. It is our Dharma that holds together and supports the righteous purpose of our spiritual path.” [http://www.yoga-vision.com](http://www.yoga-vision.com/home). This is all Hinduism here.

<http://www.yogajournal.com/yjevents/losangeles.cfm> speaks of transforming breathing into a spiritual practice.

**On the Other Hand…**

http://www.yogafamily.com/QA/index.shtm#religion says it is spiritual but not a religion. “Yoga is a spiritual practice and is not dependent on a religion.   There are religions such as Hindu that were born from Yoga.  It is, however, incorporated into some religions such a Jainism and Buddhism.  Most yoga practitioners do believe in a divine being or deities.  Yoga is about self-awareness and discovering the divine within, creating a strong sense of self and of human kind.”

 Something can be religious and still falsely claim not to be religious. Note that this same quote says that it is discovering the divine within. So how is discovering the divine within not religious?

**Is Yoga A Belief System?**

The same web site tells us how the universe was created: “Om is the universal sound that all sounds originated from and all creation emerged.”

You can read other beliefs of yoga at http://www.hathayogalesson.com/.

**Is Yoga A Faith?**

In an age when religious practice has become more a matter of personal choice than a mandate of tradition, this thoughtful volume serves as a road map to contemporary spirituality.

by Phil Catalfo in his except from his book “Shopping for Faith” on the web site for the LA Conference: http://www.yogajournal.com/views/384\_1.cfm

**The Two Faces of Yoga**

According to the defunct web site www. Yogihara.com, which was a part of the Yogi Alliance.

 You Have a Choice .... To dabble on the surface of Yoga or to probe deeper and uncover the priceless secrets and benefits that Yoga really has to offer.

 Yogi Hari is a master who can show you the way if you have a sincere desire to know more than the superficial physical aspect of Yoga. The science of yoga is designed to accelerate your evolution and take you to the goal of perfection or God Realization.

We are not criticizing Yogi Hara and others by quoting them. Rather, where one might expect untruthfulness by claiming yoga is not religious, we are commending them for their honesty as to what yoga is about.

**Are the Hindu Scriptures the Foundation for Yoga Today?**

 The Annual Southwest Yoga Conference, held in Austin, Texas has about 43 presenters. Its homepage says, Yoga is a “Reunion of Body, Soul, and Mind” On another page it says, “The Vedas and Upanishads form the basis of the yoga tradition and are the oldest texts in which the term yoga is described and explained. While the Vedas show the mantric foundation for yoga practices, the Upanishads set forth the way of Self-knowledge that is the real orientation of yoga. A study of these teachings, which form the background for the yoga Sutras, is indispensable for all those who want a real understanding of classical yoga.”

The koshas, “layers” or “sheaths,” make up one such map, charted by yogic sages some 3,000 years ago. Written about in the Upanishads, the kosha model navigates an inner journey—starting from the periphery. By Shiva Rea at the LA Yoga Conference

 The three main Hindu scriptures are the Vedas, Upanishads, and Mahabharata (including the Bhagavad Gita).

**What Does Yoga Teach About Religion**

<http://www.kriyayoga.com/var/cd.htm> says, “Some of the so called spiritual traditions do certainly aim at totally different goals. Some for example may only lead to an understanding or communication with Astral worlds. The dimension just beyond the physical dimension and still far away from God-Union. Some traditions do teach people to communicate with Astral beings, even obeying Astral spirits. This of course can never be truly called spiritual. True spiritual paths always lead to freedom, Love and God-Union. There are however a number of truly spiritual traditions in many different cultures that meet this criteria.

To be completely true, one must admit that every way of life is finally leading back to God. Otherwise God's creation could not be perfect. God is perfect in any way, so he invented whatever needed to make sure all his divine children enjoy their life and finally find their way back home after experiencing the denser dimensions of his creation.”

**Why Do Knowledgeable Christians Have a Problem with Yoga?**

It might be hard for a non-Christian to understand why Christians have trouble with yoga. Perhaps an analogy will help. After a woman is married, if she talks socially with another man, plays tennis with another man, or has another man as a friend that is usually OK. If the other man is hitting on the woman, or constantly telling the woman how wrong her husband is, or wants to set her up for an affair, then the wife has no business being with the man.

 A genuine Christians has given their life over to Jesus Christ as their Lord [Master] and Savior. If they then become a member of a non-Christian organization (like a Computer club), is involved in an exchange of ideas (like a book club), practice non-Christian exercise (like basketball), that is just fine. There is no incompatibility. But when a Christian joins a class that exercise to enhance spiritual energy based on Hindu teaching. Yoga is really not about living; it is about dying, dissociating from this material world to escape the cycle of reincarnation.

“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” (2 Cor. 11:2-3 NIV)

**On the Other Hand, What Does Yoga Say About Christianity?**

<http://www.kriyayoga.com/var/cd.htm> says, “For example those of you who may have suffered from Christianization in past centuries may prefer a more moderate approach to God outside a church or religion, which is certainly fine and perfect. God never has been attached to any church or religion….”

“Some of the churches said and sometimes still say, that they are the only representatives of God on earth. This is completely wrong and only used to attract persons into a particular religion for matters of increasing that religions might and power on earth compared to its "competitor-religions" !!! God is Love and all is made of his Divine Love - absolutely all - hence all are made of God. God has been sending Divine souls to every country in need, to every culture in need - because all are his children. There is no such thing like a holy country. Every country is an equal part of God's creation. All people are equal to God. Divine children of God. People know this truth or feel it. There are and have always been Saints within churches or religions as well as out of any religion or church. Many Divine souls came directly from God incarnating into different cultural groups just to show that every part of his creation, every minority is beloved by him and blessed with his living presence”

http://www.kriyayoga.com/english/on\_your\_wings/relationships.htmHow our attitude toward God and others affects our own well-being, health and spiritual progress.

Be open toward all and open toward God at the same time - continuously - to benefit most from all experiences God is offering you here and anywhere else and to spiritually grow in freedom and love.

Most people are closed toward God because most of their activities serve their very own ego and nothing else. Hence all there activities and relationship are ego-centric. The first graphic shows two typical persons closed to God and closed to each other. Whatever they do has little or no positive effect on their spiritual development.

**Origins of Yoga**

Yoga comes from the Sanskrit word for discipline or yoking. Its purpose was to concentrate the mind and lead to self-mortification to escape the cycles of reincarnation. It is at least as old as the Hindu Veda scriptures, which describe a long-haired ascetic (Rig Veda 10:136) and the Vratya group who practice ascetism, strange breathing exercises, and unusual bodily positions (Atharva Veda Book 15)

 The actual word “yoga” was not known to be used until the Upanishads (800-200 A.D.) in the Katha, Svetasvatara, and Maitri, Yogatattva Upanishads). Yoga is also mentioned in the Mahabharata and the *Bhagavad Gita*.

**Yoga in General**

Different schools of yoga have different teachings and emphases, but in general they teach the following.

**Body Positions:** This is what non-practitioners of yoga often think of first. Yoga has many other points though.

**Breathing:** Yoga often emphasizes controlling the breath and being aware of the breathing process. Yoga is a means to prepare to die, to avoid future reincarnations.

**Concentration and Meditation:** The symbol of meditation is a lord (Isvara) which usually is one or more Hindu deities.

**Isolation:** From other people and things for periods of time.

**Differentiate** between consciousness (of self) and awareness (or surroundings and condition). Yoga is defined as “the cessation of the transformations of ordinary awareness.” (Yogasutra (YS) 1:5-11)

**Some Schools of Yoga**

**Raja** (Classical) Yoga of Patanjali - Patanjali who wrote the Yogasutra. Vyasa wrote a “Commentary on the aphorisms of yoga”. Vacaspatimisra also wrote a commentary called “An Unerring Intepretation of the Principles of Yoga” Around 1500 A.D. Vijnanabhiksu wrote “A Supplementary Commentary on Yoga). It is also mentioned in the Yogatattva Upanishad at the end of verse 129.

Classical yoga emphasizes the “eight-limbed discipline) which is

Interpersonal restraint (non-injury, non-falsehood, etc.)

Internal restraint (personal cleanliness)

Appropriate bodily positions

Awareness of breathing

Detachment of one’s senses

One-pointed concentration on the object of meditation

Even flow of awareness

Trance-like awareness (complete apprehension (samadhi)

**Audition** (Mantra Yoga) involves repetition of the same sounds and being under the guidance of a guru for 12 years. The Yogatattva Upanishad (21-22) prescribes this for people of average or below average intelligence.

**Bhakti** (Devotion) Yoga it is described in the Hindu *Bhagavad Gita* chapter 12. It combines faith in a Hindu god (such as Krishna) with devoting all of one’s actions to the god.

 Deepak Chopra, in his keynote address at the 2001 Midwest Yoga and Wellness Conference, said that we can return to wholeness (which means healing) through the principles of yoga: hatha yoga postures; breathing, meditation, and mind/body principles of raja yoga; karma yoga--the way of action--“having an inner attitude that everything I do is a divine movement of the Eternal”; and bhakti yoga--the yoga of love, which Chopra says is the ultimate truth at the heart of creation.” www.yogachicago.com/jul01/midwestyoga.shtml

**Hatha** (Exertion) Yoga was started round 1000-1300 A.D. Yogatattva Upanishad verses 24-128 define this a rigorous bodily discipline, breathing exercise, and digestive constraint to prepare for the classical Raja Yoga. There are about 80 body positions. These are supposed to purify the channels of the body and make available new sources of psychic energy (sakti) in different body centers. Some say “ha” represents the sun and the breath from the chest to the nose and mouth, and “tha” represents the moon and the breath from the abdominum to the feet. It teaches ancient bodily veins and centers of energy.

**Jnana** (Knowledge) Yoga This is defined in the Hindu scripture the *Bhagavad Gita* 2:11-39. It emphasizes differentiating between the unchanging self and the changing ordinary awareness and condition.

**Karma** (Action) Yoga is mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* chapter 3. Emphasizes how a person should act and avoiding becoming attached to the rewards of one’s action.

**Kundalini** (Serpent Power) Yoga uses sexual practices and seeks to uncoil the serpent power within a person, which extends from the genitals to the brain.

**Laya** (Dissolution) Yoga mentioned in the Yogatattva Upanishad verse 23. At all times one should meditate on the Lord (Isvara).

**Tantric** (Sexual) Yoga is said to be the union of male and female principles. One said that hatha yoga was like an educational B.A. and tantric yoga is like a Ph.D. They chant mantas, believe in astrology, and use marijuana. Groups have equal number of men and women; and one of their five “ingredients” is sexual union.

**Buddhist “Yoga”** - Buddhism came out of Buddhism, but it has similar yoga practices.

**Jain “Yoga”** Most vegetarians are “wimps” compared to Jains. Do plants deserve to die so that you can feed yourself? Jains believe the most holy thing you can do is starve to death.

Yoga emphasizes separation between the illusory physical world and the spiritual. Yoga requires a guru, or teacher. Some yoga gurus do quite well financially.

**A Comparison**

Yoga and genuine Christianity are incompatible.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Belief** | **Christianity** | **Yoga** |
| God | One Triune God | Many deities, or Brahman |
| Devoted to: | God: Father, Son, Spirit | Various deities, or Self |
| Salvation | One way to get to heaven through Jesus | Not really applicable, except yoga teaches how to escape the cycle of reincarnation |
| Reincar-nation | Appointed to man to die once and face judgment -Heb.9:27 | Reincarnation as people, animals, demons, etc. |
| Scriptures | The Bible (Old and New Testaments) | The Hindu Vedas and Upanishads give the foundation & orientation |
| Goal | Eternal life of joy with in Heaven | Merge into the cosmos and loss all sense of individuality |

**Transcendental Meditation**

This group has more of an emphasis on meditation and less emphasize on physical exercise. It presents itself to the world as not a religion, but at least one U.S., court has ruled that it religious. It should have the same rights and restrictions in schools and public places as other religious groups.

**The Way to True Enlightenment**

How does one a relationship with the True God of the Universe? In all the hustle and bustle of the world, sometimes it is important to be quiet and listen. Nobody would know how to have a relationship with God except God Himself. I do not think God is particularly impressed with people’s inventiveness in making up ways to God, especially when He has already told us. Contrary to what some might want, the way to God is not complex, does not required years of learning special knowledge at the feet of a guru, and is actually quite simple, though it takes a complete commitment of your whole life to follow it. Briefly it is this:

Listen to what God reveals about Himself in the Bible. There is only One True God, eternally co-existing in three beings: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He does not lie, He is almighty, all-knowing, and the most loving being in the universe. However, He also has wrath against those who choose to disobey Him. God is perfect, holy, and good, terrifyingly so. He is just, and punishes people for their sins. He would reward everyone who lives perfectly as He commands with bliss in Heaven, except…

No one lives up to what they themselves have been taught about obeying the true God. We all have sinned, not just in doing things disobedient to God, but failing to do what we know is right. We have said things we should never have said, and God, who judges our hearts, sees that we have had evil attitudes too. If God were only powerful, good, and just, Heaven would be empty of people.

In addition to His other attributes, God is also full of love and mercy. He gave us impure, sinful creatures a way to be forgiven of our sins, and cleansed so that we can go to Heaven through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus, while was 100% human and 100% God, lived a perfectly sinless life and died on the cross for our sins. On the third day, Jesus physically rose from the dead, and took the punishment for our sins upon Himself. Jesus Christ is not a way to God though; Jesus said in John 14:6 that He is the only way to God.

This gift was given freely; nothing we can do can earn this gift or pay God back. But we must choose to accept this precious gift of eternal life. We must pray to ask God into our hearts. We must accept Jesus not only as our friend and our guide, but trust in Him as our Savior, and resolve to follow Him as our Lord. You will not be alone. The Holy Spirit will come and dwell in your heart, and given you rich peace and joy in this life, and assurance of salvation in the real life, that is the life eternal.

**Conclusion**

 Can you imagine a Christian attending pagan feasts because they liked the company and festivities? Paul the apostle could, and told us never to do that. “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons. Are we trying to arouse the Lord’s jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Cor. 10:21-22 NIV). Many people believe things about Jesus, but we must believe in Jesus, trusting in Him alone as our only way of salvation.

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