

“Can You Take The Hinduism Out of Yoga?”

by Genelle Pepple

The 2012 “Yoga in America” survey found that 20.4 million Americans, or 8.7% of U.S. adults practice yoga. Over 82% are women, and the majority of practitioners are between the ages of 18-44. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/06/american-yoga_n_2251360.html

Why are so many American’s doing yoga? Isn’t it a Hindu, spiritual practice? In July, 2012 the Huffington Post ran an article addressing this very question. It was titled as follows:

“Is Yoga A Spiritual Practice? A Community Discussion”

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/13/is-yoga-a-spiritual-pract_n_1632532.html

The above article was posted to the public on the Huffington Post’s Religion’s Facebook page to solicit responses from every day people like you and I. What a variety of responses came in! Right away it became apparent to this reader that people hold many different and conflicting views of what yoga IS, or is NOT. I also took note that while many have an opinion about it, this opinion seems to be based on personal experience and background, not on actual study and insight as to it’s origins, purpose, and ability to use the body to effect spiritual transformation. I’ve included many of the statements, below.

The following picture was posted on the Huffington Post’s website. It was taken from “Mind Over Madness Yoga,” a Summer Solstice event featuring thousands of New Yorkers convening in Times Square for a free session.



So, how did people respond to the question: “Yoga: Is It A Spiritual Practice?”

Responses:

- Some commenters said yoga was a great way of connecting with their Creator regardless of one’s faith. Another said that for them, yoga is more spiritual than church.
- Others expressed the notion that the practice is solely a fitness activity that is positive, yet isn't up for spiritual discourse. For instance, one commenter said, “Anything that causes people to relax and get in shape has got to be good thing.”

- On the flip side, another person said: “Yoga was never an exercise. It is a part of a meditation. It helps you get here and now.”
- Another said, “I think the spirituality within yoga pertains to Hinduism. Take the Hinduism out of it, and you’ve just got exercise, which isn’t spiritual at all.”

That comment struck me. It begs the question: “CAN you take the Hinduism out of yoga?” Can you leave-off the spiritual elements and metaphysical components of yoga and take what is only beneficial to yourself? Can’t one just do a few simple yoga stretches to improve flexibility, relieve stress, or prevent injuries without it being a big deal, or harming you in any way, spiritually?

With these questions in mind, I would like to share what I found as I studied this personally. What is yoga and what are it’s roots? What is Hinduism? Is yoga truly a “spiritual discipline,” a “metaphysical practice,” or just exercise and stretching—for those who only want to focus on this aspect of it. Can practicing yoga, or any of its asanas actually influence and change your spirituality? What are Asana’s, the vocal meditative syllable “Om or Ohm,” and mantras? Can be such a thing as “Christian Yoga” or is this a s-t-r-e-t-c-h? What does God says in His Word? Yes, this is a lot to cover, but oh so important to understand!

Definition of Yoga and its Purpose

First, I would like to define yoga and its purpose. According to Elliot Miller, noted New Age expert and editor of the *Christian Research Journal*:

Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word *yug*, which means “to yoke.” This is a term [most Christians are] familiar with from the Bible. A yoke is a crossbar that joins two draft animals at the neck so they can work together; the term, therefore, is applied metaphorically to people being joined together or united in a cause. In Hinduism, as in many religions, union is desired with nothing less than God or the Absolute, and yoga is the system that Hindus have developed to achieve that end.

The historic purpose behind yoga, therefore, is to achieve union with the Hindu concept of God. This is the purpose behind virtually all of the Eastern varieties of yoga, including those we encounter in the West. This does not mean it is the purpose of every practitioner of yoga, for many people clearly are not practicing it for spiritual reasons but merely to enhance their physical appearance, ability, or health.

However...it’s nearly impossible to practice yoga and divorce it from its spiritual elements.
<http://pastormark.tv/2011/11/02/christian-yoga-its-a-stretch>

Okay. If you are a yoga practitioner, you may be saying: “Phooey, I’m not Hindu and I don’t see where practicing it has any effect on me spiritually. I DO divorce it from its spiritual (Hindu) elements.” Well, what if you’re wrong? Have you ever contemplated the significance of the answer to that question? Please consider the implications and read a little further. There is an abundance of information out there, which addresses this question. I’d like to take a few minutes to look at what Hindu’s believe to gain a full understanding of their concept of God, and what yoga means to them.

The first question to address is, do Hindu’s and Christian’s have the same concept of “God”? Are they both worshipping the same divine being? My answer would be: “Definitely not!”

“The Hindu concept refers to being yoked with the universal mind (not a personal God, but an impersonal force or energy). The ultimate result is to realize one’s own inner divinity. The Hindu idea is that our physical bodies hold our spirits in bondage. The goal of Yoga, then, is to release this inner divine spirit so that it may yoke with or unite with the universal mind.”
<http://www.discernment-ministries.org/Newsletters/NL2013MayJun.pdf>

What does a Hindu yoga practitioner and scholar have to say about the purpose of yoga? Rajiv Malhotra, Founder, Infinity Foundation states in his article, “A Hindu View of Christian Yoga”:

“While yoga is not a ‘religion’ in the sense that the Abrahamic religions are, it is a well-established spiritual path...its spiritual benefits are undoubtedly available to anyone.”

He goes on to explain that he agrees with Southern Baptist Seminary President, Albert Mohler, who speaks of the incompatibility between Christianity and yoga. “*The idea that the body is a vehicle for reaching consciousness with the divine is fundamentally at odds with Christian teaching.*” In other words, Christian yoga is an oxymoron. But the incompatibility runs much deeper, says Rajiv. “Yoga’s metaphysics center around the quest to obtain liberation from past karma...and the baggage from prior lives (reincarnation).” “Westerners...have seldom worked out the contradictions with core Biblical doctrines.”

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rajiv-malhotra/hindu-view-of-christian-yoga_b_778501.html

Rajiv Malhotra clearly states what is found in many other writings. Hinduism teaches a yoking between the *atman* (true “self,” spirit or soul) and the *Brahman* (supreme soul) that is in everything and that permeates everything. This is a pantheistic view of God that is inconsistent with the biblical description of God and His character.

“Yoga is a Hindu religious practice aimed at attaining enlightenment. There is not a focus on looking *out* to Jesus Christ for salvation, but rather *in* to self for enlightenment and peace.”
<http://pastormark.tv/2011/11/02/christian-yoga-its-a-stretch>

So, based on the statements above, one can recognize that yoga IS a spiritual discipline, for some. But, you may be saying, it is NOT a spiritual discipline for me! Well, the next question is, can you do yoga without it having any spiritual context or application in your life? Can you take the Hinduism out of it, even though, to a Hindu, every facet of it is a spiritual discipline aimed at attaining enlightenment?

The answer to this will become abundantly clear as you continue in this study. What does the Bible teach? **John 14:6 says: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** There is only one way to salvation and that is through Jesus Christ. Hinduism is in direct opposition to this biblical teaching.

Hinduism

What do Hindu’s believe? According to Wikipedia,

“Hinduism...is an umbrella term comprising the plurality of religious phenomena originating in, and based on, the Vedic traditions.” (Pluralism) “Unlike other religions in the World, the Hindu religion does not claim any one Prophet, it does not worship any one God, it does not believe in any one philosophic concept, it does not follow any one act of religious rites or performances; in fact, it does not satisfy the traditional features of a religion or creed. It is a way of life and nothing more”. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism>

This is in direct conflict with the text we just read above in John 14:6. Christianity believes that there is only *one* God and only *one* way to salvation, which is through Jesus Christ.

Danda, A Yoga instructor associated with the Classical Hindu Yoga Academy, said: “Is Yoga a religion that denies Jesus Christ? Yes, just as Christianity denies the Hindu Maha Devas (deities) such as Siva, Vishnu, Durga, and Krishna, to name a few, Hinduism and its many Yogas have nothing to do with God and Jesus.”

<http://www.discernment-ministries.org/Newsletters/NL2013MayJun.pdf>

And why would this yoga instructor say this? Because Hinduism believes in the worship of many (thousands & millions) of gods, demigods, avatars, and idols. Many Christians like to believe that: “we are all talking about the *same* God,” but Hindus clearly understand the difference. They reject the Judeo-Christian God of the Bible and His Son, Jesus Christ. They believe in an impersonal, pantheistic God, as do most who have an Eastern or New Age philosophy of life.

Let’s explore Hindu beliefs a little more because the Hindu concept of the “soul” and “Brahman” (the Absolute One/God Almighty) IS confusing to many Christians.

Hinduism teaches the body is just a vehicle for reaching consciousness with the divine, man is NOT a *mortal* being created in God’s *own* image. God Almighty is a Divine Consciousness that permeates everything, NOT a personal God who thinks, feels, creates, and who is “worthy to receive glory, honor, and power”. (Rev. 4:11 and 5:12)

So, the quest in life for the Hindu is spiritual union of his immortal soul with the Divine Consciousness, which, when obtained, is called self-realization, enlightenment, liberation, moksha, samadhi, nirvana, illumination, or connecting with the universal consciousness. *In other words, the goal is to realize your own divinity.* This certainly is not the Christian’s goal. “There is none righteous, no, not one.” (Romans 3:9-11)

Biblical teaching is very clear that we are not inherently divine and never will be. This is an Eastern, New Age teaching, which traces clear back to the original lie from Satan in the Garden of Eden when he told Eve: “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:4) In other words: “eat the fruit and you’ll become like God”. Ever since Eden, Satan has continued to try and convince mankind they can be like God, and a lot of people still “bite the apple”!

To a Hindu, yoga is all about realizing one’s own inner divinity. Because this may not be your personal goal and you reject the concept of becoming divine, does that make you impervious to the practice of yoga? After reading this through, hopefully you can answer this question without hesitation.

Salvation In Hinduism

Salvation in Hinduism is very different from the Christian understanding of salvation.

“Salvation in Hinduism means to be free from rebirths and to have Union with God Almighty.”

“Hinduism believes that if you do not accomplish this, but have lived as good human beings, you will be reborn as gods or humans in prominent positions (reincarnation).

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism>

Hindus believe “that all humans come equipped to recover their own innate divinity without recourse to any historical person’s suffering on their behalf.” (This is a direct rejection of Christ.) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rajiv-malhotra/hindu-view-of-christian-yoga_b_778501.html

Hinduism, therefore, does not teach repentance of sin and the need of a Saviour, but rather that one can find the power of redemption within himself.

Christian Confusion

Have you ever heard these sayings, or ones that are similar?

- “There are many ways to God.”
- “All roads lead to God.”
- “Aren’t we all worshipping the same God, but just by a different name?”
- “Other religions have good things to offer, too.”
- “I take what’s good and leave the bad.”
- “Isn’t God’s spirit in all of us? (Implying the Eastern concept of inherent divinity is similar to Christians having the Holy Spirit dwelling within.)
- “Meditation isn’t harmful, it just helps you relax.”
- “Prana is similar to the Holy Spirit.”
- “Yoga is just stretching.”

The statements above reflect the confusion that now exists within Christianity. There has been a “shift” in our thinking. What used to be black and white and clear-cut is now blurred because Eastern philosophies and practices have found their way into Christianity. If this were not true, the statements above could not have been made. Isn’t it true that our culture today doesn’t want things to be black and white? That’s considered being rigid, judgmental, or non-inclusive. “Yikes, who wants to be like *that*?”

So, how have eastern philosophies and practices found their way into Christianity? I believe it is due to many things, but for now, I would like to focus on just one aspect of how the shift has occurred and that is “terminology”. Christians hear friends use terminology which they think they understand and agree with. Because we want to get along with those around us it’s easy to suppose we’re talking about the same thing. But we need to be very careful, here.

When we talk with someone from a New Age or eastern mindset, terms like soul, spirit, God, divinity, divine, Universal Presence, Supreme Being, God within you, life force, energy, meditation, and spiritual exercises/disciplines have drastically different definitions, depending on your core beliefs. At least they *should* because Christians are supposed to base their beliefs on the Bible and the Bible alone, “Sola Scriptura!” The terms and the philosophies are not the same.

Please see the following charts to compare and contrast Biblical interpretation versus Eastern, New Age interpretation and understanding of terms that are used interchangeably. When you compare and contrast, you can really see how they differ! (Wikipedia & the Bible were used for most explanations given below; you can look them up individually if you’d like.)

Term /Word	Christian Understanding	Eastern Philosophy / New Age Belief
Soul ¹ Spirit ² Holy Spirit ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ^{1 & 2}The “breath of life”; what was breathed into Adam by God on the 6th day of creation. “And man became a living soul”: body + breath. (Gen. 2:7) • ^{1 & 2}A living soul is the combination of the breath of life plus man’s physical body. The “spirit” (breath), returns to God at death. A man does not HAVE a soul, a person IS a living soul when their body & breath are together. (Ecc. 12:7) • ^{1 & 2}The Bible teaches man is <i>mortal</i>, his “spirit or soul” (breath + body) is mortal. God ONLY has immortality. (I Tim. 6:15-16) • When man sinned, he became mortal and subject to death because the wages of sin is death. He would never be immortal again until he is restored at the 2nd coming of Christ. (Gen. 3:1-6, 22-23; Rom. 6:23 ; John 11:25; Ezek. 18:4) • ^{1 & 2}The “spirit” does not have any life, wisdom, or feeling after a person dies. It is the breath of life, and nothing more. (James 2:26 says: “The body without the spirit is dead.”) • ^{1 & 2}Psalms 115:17 says: “The dead praise not the Lord.” After death, your spirit ceases to exist; like how electricity ceases to exist in the bulb when the light is turned off. Man’s spirit is not in heaven praising God. (Psalm 146:4; Psalm 6:5; Ecc. 9:5-6,10) • Death is called “sleep”. (Job 14:10-12, 14) • Mortal man will not receive immortality until the 2nd coming of Christ, when we receive our reward. If we become immortal when we die, we are receiving our reward at that time. Death is a “sleep”. (I Cor. 15:51-53; I Thess. 4:16-17; Rev. 22:12) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiritual Force: the universal life force running within and between all; equated with the “soul”. • Vital force inherent in all things, also equated with the “soul”, which is immortal in Eastern thought. • Chi, Qi, Ki: these are also equated with your soul. It is a metaphysical attribute of your self, which cannot be detected by physical means. It is the natural energy or life-force within. • Soul/Spirit: The immortal essence of a person, living thing, or object. • Your “higher self” • Soul/Spirit: The force of life having a spiritual energy of consciousness. • Soul/Spirit: An essence that manifests itself as mind/soul through pantheistic or panentheistic hierarchy. • The <i>atman</i>, (inner-self, soul, or essence, or living entity.) • Soul/Spirit: The immortal essence of a living entity, which resides in the body — the mediating vehicle between the individual, human world, and absolute, cosmic reality. • Spirit: A holy, sacred, divine, or supernatural being. <p>Eastern thought teaches that man has a part of him, which is <i>immortal</i> and conscious. The Bible is clear that when we die, we return to the same state of consciousness that we had before we were born: NONE. Death is like “sleep”—you don’t know anything. All the philosophies above originate with Satan’s original lie “that you will not surely die”. (Gen. 3:4,5) That lie continues to deceive people, even today.</p>
Spirit ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ²A demonic entity, or “familiar spirit” (one who claims to contact the dead) • ²A supernatural being, such as an angel of light or of darkness. 	<p>Hindus believe there is evil in the world, but no single devil-like entity. There is a concept of an evil spirit, but it does not remain evil forever & can evolve to goodness. http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/2001/08/What-The-Devil.aspx#</p>

<p>Holy Spirit³</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ³Can be blasphemed against (Lk. 12:8-10) *So is not an all-pervasive, invisible, life-force. • ³A personal being. He “speaks & directs us”. (Acts 13:2-4) • ³He helps us & testifies of God. (Jn. 15:26) • ³He can be “grieved”. (Isa. 63:10 & Eph. 4:30) • ³He “reveals things to us and knows the things of God.” (I Cor.12:11) • ³He guides us into all truth. (Jn.16:13) • ³He makes intercession for us & searches hearts. (Rom. 8:26-27) • ³He descended from heaven, in the form of a dove, at Christ’s baptism. (Matt. 3:16-17) • ³He is referred to as a unique being. We are to baptize in His name. (Matt. 28:19) • He is not a cosmic force, essence, or impersonal power. He has attributes of a distinct, intelligent, individual being. “Prana” cannot be blasphemed and does not share any of the above attributes of the Holy Spirit. 	<p>Some Christians have equated “Prana” as being the same as the Holy Spirit. Here are definitions of Prana:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prana: a subtle, invisible force; the life-force that pervades the body. • Prana is also defined as energy, vitality, power, the foundation and essence of all life. It flows in everything that exists. It regulates all physical functions of the human body. It can be controlled and regulated within the body. • Pranayama releases energy blockages. • Udana Prana accompanies the awakening of the Kundalini Shakti & can allow the astral body to separate from the physical body. It connects the chakras. • Prana can be like our “vibration” or “aura” that is perceptible to others. • The practice of meditation and Mantra maintains pure Prana and the practice of Pranayama increases our capacity to store Prana. <p>http://www.yogaindailylife.org/esystem/yoga/en/160300/the-spiritual-background/prana/</p> <p>With the description above, how can some Christians equate prana with being like the Holy Spirit and/or the breath of life? Hindu’s certainly do not entertain this idea.</p> <p>Holy Spirit: A concept & being rejected by Hindu, Eastern, & New Age thought.</p>
<p>God</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The God of the Bible; a personal God – separated from His creation and sovereign over it. • The Creator God (Gen. 1:1) • The “One God”; no others are like Him. (I Cor. 8:6; Exo. 20:2-6, Isa 46:9,10) • A personal God: “I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt...” (Deut. 5:6) • The God who gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish... (John 3:16) • A loving God who is approachable and personally interested in each one of us. (I John 4:8,16) • A God who made man in His own image. (Gen. 1:26) • The one, alone, who hath immortality. (I Tim. 6:15-16) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A supreme, universal Spirit that is the origin and support of the universe and who does not have any specific form. God is Almighty, but is intermixed in everything as well. (Hindu) • One Being of ultimate oneness (Brahman) through infinite representations of gods and goddesses. (Hindu) • The natural divinity that is in everything and permeates everything, including mankind. (Buddhism, Hindu, New Age, etc.) • An impersonal spiritual substance that is one with nature and the cosmos. (Pantheism - the belief that everything is God and that reality consists only of the universe and nature.) • A non-personal God, a higher consciousness that is within yourself. (Many Eastern religions, New Age) • An all-powerful, but unknowable God. (Muslim)

Meditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meditate on the Word of God. Psalm 1:2 & Joshua 1:8, Psalm 119:15,27,99 • Deliberately, consciously, focusing on a specific Bible passage & reflecting on its meaning. • Focusing on the Bible to gain a deeper understanding of the Word of God. • Filling the mind with thoughts related to biblical passages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often refers to <i>mantras</i>, a sound, syllable, word, or group of words (such as Aum, Om) that are considered capable of "creating (spiritual) transformation." • Focusing on the breath, or a repetitive sound, word, phrase, or chant. • Is an essential part of the pathway to salvation, union with the Divine, and/or a higher state of consciousness. • Emptying the mind of external thoughts in order to bring about an <i>altered state of consciousness</i>, for the purpose of merging human consciousness with divine consciousness. • A mystical practice used for the purpose of uncovering hidden wisdom, and union with the divine.
Energy (A word commonly used in many healing arts, creating confusion for Christians.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strength and vitality required for sustained physical or mental activity. • Power derived from the utilization of physical or chemical resources. • Human energy is usually expressed as muscle contractions & heat production, made possible by the metabolism of food. • Chemical energy is released as a result of chemical reaction, as in the metabolism of food. • All activities of the body require energy, which is supplied to the body by carbohydrates, fats, proteins, and the process of metabolism. • The energy in the nucleus of an atom. • Radiant energy as seen in radio waves, visible light, electromagnetic waves, radiographs, and gamma rays. • Thermal, electrical, mechanical, chemical, radiant, or kinetic energy, which are forms energy found when doing work, and which—in that process, is 'lost' and cannot be recaptured or used again. • The energy that our body requires just to live and do everyday activities. The energy that fuels our bodies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chi, qi, ki, prana: the active principle, vital force, life force, or energy flow inherent in all living things. The inner power that you can control, or direct. • Vitalism • Spiritual Force: the universal life force running within and between all. • Chakras / Meridians: the pathways through which the life force energy flows. • The "force" referred to in <i>Star Wars</i> • An intelligent, primordial energy that permeates all living things. • A forcefield of energy that is unseen, but which can be altered, balanced, or manipulated to bring about healing. • This is spiritual energy, vital force, esoteric energy, also called "life energy or Qi", energies of the subtle body which flow through special points called chakras or meridians, which are channels for the flow of consciousness. <p>Rhythmic and special breathing techniques are believed to influence the flow of these energetic currents.</p> <p>Can you see the difference between the two? One is dealing with a spiritualistic type of energy...the other deals with scientific laws & understanding of how our body utilizes energy to function. The latter does not seek to alter or manipulate that energy to obtain healing. It does not see that energy in the pantheistic way where it permeates all living things.</p>

<p>Spiritual Exercises</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading the Bible • Memorizing Scripture • Praying • Fasting • Meditating on God’s Word • Surrendering to God 	<p>The following are spiritual exercises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yoga • Entering the “Stillness” or the “Thin Place”; stilling the mind in a mystical way for a higher state of awareness. • Meditation: For the purpose of bringing about an altered state of consciousness & heightened state of perception. • Use of mantras, a sound, syllable, words, or phrases capable of creating spiritual transformation. • Breath-control and relaxation techniques and practices. • The mystical practice of “Contemplation” (clearing one’s mind & being “still” to <i>listen</i> for guidance from God. An esoteric, mystical meditation.) • Centering Prayer (repeating a word over and over for the same purpose as stated above.) • “Centering yourself / Grounding yourself” in yoga. (The meditative practice of shifting your consciousness to achieve greater self-awareness.) • Soaking Prayer (seeking to obtain a spiritual experience by seeking out the presence of God through mystical exercises) • Visualization to discover inner power and guidance. • Visualization techniques to focus concentration. • All practices that strive toward oneness with the universe, or finding the divine within. <p>http://www.gotquestions.org/spiritual-disciplines.html</p> <p>http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/503</p>
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The charts above demonstrate how common terms can mean different things to different people and how important it is to really know what you believe.

What happens when you place yourself on ground where you regularly hear Eastern concepts and verbiage? I would submit that you will become “leavened”. Your framework of understanding slowly changes and you adopt a modified meaning of those terms and concepts without even knowing it.

This is broader than just yoga. The things we watch, the books we read, the music we listen to, the activities we participate in, the company we keep, the way in which we spend our time – all mold who we are. We are either being pulled toward God, or away.

By beholding we become changed.

Many of us have heard he saying: “by beholding we become changed”. This can either be for good (becoming more like Christ) or for evil (becoming more like the world). The daily choices we make all have an effect on which direction we’re going. God wants to be there in all we do.

We are influenced by those around us; slowly, imperceptively. Can repeatedly hearing certain words and phrases actually change our thinking? A resounding “yes!” This is what advertising and propaganda are all about! Can the circle of friends you associate with and the belief system they espouse have an effect on your own view? “Yes!” We’ve all heard the old adage: “Choose your friends wisely”. There is truth in this saying or why else would parents be concerned about whom their kids associate with?

Consider this. If you practice yoga, was there ever a time when you first said: “Om” and it felt strange? Or, you chanted something and felt uncomfortable with it? Or, you sat in the lotus position with your thumb and middle finger touching and it seemed awkward, in a spiritual sense? If you answered “yes,” but have changed your answer to where you could now answer: “No, those things are not strange or uncomfortable for me anymore...,” then you’ve been “leavened”. What initially popped into your mind as a flag or caution has diminished and no longer concerns you.

Going to a yoga class regularly and associating with others in the class builds friendships. You are part of a group. We all know groups affect people. Groups change people. That’s how trends are set. Popular culture defines our reality. Scott Ritsema (of “Media On The Brain”) made an interesting statement: “By beholding we become *captured*.” Could it be that hearing yoga verbiage and buzz words is not innocuous to your thinking and values? Can this change you? I would submit: “yes,” that’s the nature of how it works.

Have you heard these commonly used phrases or words during a yoga class?

- Ground yourself , Center yourself (Pause, breathe and connect with the ground beneath you.)
- Let go and be present in the moment
 - (A state of being where you are totally engaged and focused on the person or activity you are involved in at that moment. This idea connects you with yourself, increasing self-awareness, for the purpose of obtaining the goal of yoga – enlightenment.)
- Chakras (The 7 main energy centers in the body through which vital energy flows.)
- Chant – (A repetition of sacred words and sounds that vibrate within and around the energy centers).
- Mudra – (Symbolic hand gestures or posture to control prana.)
- Chin Mudra – (A hand mudra, linking the thumb and index finger.)
- Mantra - A sacred syllable, word or phrase used in meditation.
- Namaste (“I bow to the Divine [light or universal Christ] within you.”)
- Namaste (Also translated as: “I honor that place in you where the whole Universe resides. And when I am in that place in me and you are in that place in you, there is only one of us.”
<http://beta.active.com/fitness/Articles/Common-Yoga-Terms-Defined>)
- Om – (Om is regarded as the original sound of creation. When you repeat it, you are in effect aligning yourself with the spirit of creation. -- from a pantheistic viewpoint)
- Oneness (This term pertains to the oneness of consciousness; being one with the universe.)
- Pranayama (The regulation of the breath through certain techniques and exercises.)
- Ujjaii breathing (A breath technique intended to activate the 7 chakras.)

*Most definitions above were taken from either Wikipedia or the websites below.
<http://ezinearticles.com/?Yoga-For-Beginners---Glossary-of-Keywords-Used-in-Yoga&id=1699781>

Honestly, what place do any of these words have in the Christian's life? They all pertain to eastern mystical beliefs.

In America, yoga is used to relax, tone, strengthen, and reduce stress. But it was never intended for this! It is a Hindu, spiritual exercise aimed at bringing the mind into an open, empty state where the inner divine spirit is released, so that it may join with the universal mind and enlightenment may occur.
<http://www.discernment-ministries.org/Newsletters/NL2013MayJun.pdf>

The practices, postures, and all parts of it contain inherent meaning.
“Yoga is a combination of both physical and spiritual exercises. It is the practice of preparing oneself to yoke, unite, or experience the Divine within. (i.e. the individual self with the Cosmic Self). It is about attaining *moksha*, or liberation from the worldly suffering and the cycle of birth and rebirth. Yoga is a holistic and spiritual system of living that is essential to the understanding and practice of Hinduism. What yoga is not is asana alone.” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/suhag-a-shukla-esq/yoga-wont-wreck-your-body_b_1195754.html

In other words, yoga is not “physical exercise and stretching” alone. It was never intended for simple stress-reduction and Western fitness clubs.

Asanas (Yoga Poses or Postures)

What are asanas?

Asanas are the various postures used in yoga. **They are based on postures that honor Hindu deities** who manifest themselves in forms such as the sun, the tiger, the tree, the snake, etc. Asanas were designed to aid in meditation and to strengthen the body...toward obtaining the realization of the true divine self, and eventually (*samadhi, moksha, or nirvana*) which is union with the divine. <http://www.discernment-ministries.org/Newsletters/NL2013MayJun.pdf>

Did you catch that? The various yoga postures are meant to honor Hindu deities.

“Many participants merely presume that the exercises are neutral and harmless, if not practiced with any spiritual intent. But in fact, the poses they so diligently practice are named after Hindu Gods.” <http://www.letusreason.org/NAMI.htm>

If you are a yoga practitioner, have you ever been to a Vinyasa Flow yoga class? If so, you've done the sequence of asanas called the “Surya Namaskara” which is usually performed (in India) at sunrise. This is the “Salute to the Sun” asanas as shown below in positions #1-6 below, looking left-to-right.





There are 8 different asanas in the sequence of 12 asana changes of the Surya Namaskara. The Vedas praised the Sun for the purpose of good health and prosperity. Physical prostration to the Sun, showing complete surrender of oneself to God, is the main aspect of these postures.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surya_Namaskar_Origins
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surya_Namaskara

In regards to Saluting the Sun, Ezekiel 8:15-18 addressed this issue in his own day when the priests of Israel were themselves bowing down to the sun in the East. They were turning their backs to the temple and worshiping the sun, just like the idolatrous people they were supposed to be different from. God called it an “abomination”.

Or, have you ever participated in the “Kundalini” postures to clear the chakras and awaken the Kundalini serpent within? The teachings of Hatha (physical) yoga teach that at the base of the spine lies coiled a great serpent power called Kundalini. A former yoga teacher for ten years, and former vice-principal of a large yoga school, now a Christian, states:

"Every posture is designed to stimulate this power to uncoil itself and rise up through the nerve centers in the spine, which are closely related to the endocrine glands, until it finally reaches the pituitary gland--the thousand petal lotus--and when this occurs after long and disciplined practice, perfect enlightenment is achieved."

http://mmoutreachinc.com/cult_groups/yoga.html

A Christian need not be instructed on the significance of the original serpent, Satan the Devil! (See Revelation 12:9) Don't you find it interesting the Kundalini postures are named after the serpent power, who is going to help you become like God (divine)? Where have we heard that before?

Below are the Kundalini set of asanas. Keep in mind there are other poses, which are also designed to “open the chakras”; these are not the only ones.



Awakening the 1st (Root Chakra) in the Crow Poses



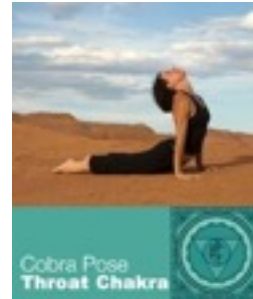
Awakening the 2nd (Sacral Chakra) in the Frog Poses



Awakening the 3rd Chakra (Solar Plexus) Stretch Pose



Awakening the 4th Chakra (Heart Chakra) Camel Pose



Awakening the 5th Chakra (Throat Chakra) Cobra Pose



Awakening the 6th Chakra (The Third Eye) Guru Pranam pose



Awakening the 7th Chakra (The Crown Chakra) Sat Kriya pose

Whether you have done these specific sequences of asanas or not, please recognize that you are not safe from unknowingly participating in yoga poses that honor Hindu gods. *Everything* in yoga has meaning and purpose. Whether you are aware of it or not, you may be doing postures that are blatantly offensive to God and detrimental to your own spiritual well being. Even though *you* may not realize the pose is worshiping another deity, God knows! How do you think He feels when he sees His people going through the motions of Hindu idol worship?

One of the early pioneers of Hatha Yoga, Richard Hittleman, stated:

“As yoga students practiced the physical positions, they would eventually be ready to investigate the spiritual component which is the entire essence of the subject”. (Yoga Journal, May/June 1993, Pg 68) <http://www.letusreason.org/NAM1.htm>

Can you see how the moment you walk into a yoga studio you’ve submitted yourself and stepped on dangerous ground? As you stretch your body into yoga poses, and practice the breathing and meditation techniques, you open yourself up for spiritual forces to move into your body. As you progress into a

relaxed state, or get “centered,” you achieve an altered state of consciousness where your brain is in the alpha state. This is a light-hypnotic state where your mind is now openly receptive to input and suggestion. From which spirit are you obtaining suggestion? Is God’s spirit actually going to manifest Himself to you through a pagan practice?

The physical levels of advancement are interconnected with spiritual levels of advancement. Yoga’s stretching, breathing, and meditation practices all work together as disciplines to bring about a spiritual awakening. One door opens another, each of which is leading down a path that takes one away from the true God of the Bible and faith in the sacrifice and salvation of Jesus Christ, alone. When one is practicing yoga exercises, whether they are aware of it or not, they are practicing *essential* (spiritual) elements of Hinduism and are methodically moving in the direction of mysticism.

Mysticism is defined on Wikipedia as:

“The pursuit of communion with, identity with, or conscious awareness of an ultimate reality, divinity, spiritual truth, or God through direct experience, intuition, instinct or insight.”
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysticism>

Remember, yoga’s purpose is to *prepare oneself to yoke, unite, or experience the Divine within*. This is almost a verbatim explanation of mysticism as stated above! Do you see how yoga is, in essence, mysticism? Do you see how it is much more than just stretching?

There are numerous ways to de-stress, and many exercise programs that incorporate stretching and physical strengthening that in no way relate to yoga...if one wants to choose them. Yoga IS INDEED a spiritual practice and Hinduism is at its core. The eight limbs of yoga are used as pathways for achieving this ultimate goal of self-realization.

We could stop here and end the study as a strong foundation has already been laid as to why Yoga is not harmless to the Christian. But, for the sake of those who still are not convinced, or who are really wrestling with this because it has been such a positive experience in their life, here is more food-for-thought.

Ohm-Om and Mantras

The use of “Ohm or Om” in Yoga is for meditation purposes.

It is thought to be the unifying vibration/syllable of the universe; “the primordial sound that resonated at the creation of our universe and which continues to resonate in each of us and all of existence.” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/suhag-a-shukla-esq/yoga-wont-wreck-your-body_b_1195754.html

It is the “mystical sound of Hindu origin, sacred in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. It is a sacred incantation to be intoned at the beginning and end of a mantra or an invocation to a Hindu deity (god) being sacrificed. **Om is an invitation to and for that God to partake of the sacrifice.**” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Om> (Emphasis supplied)

“Om is considered capable of creating spiritual transformation. Mantras, which are used in Yoga, are used to liberate the mind, consciousness, soul, atman from repeated birth and death.” The authors of the Hindu scriptures of the Upanishad...postulate that the **vocal sounds of the mantra have inherent meaning independent of the understanding of the person uttering them.**” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantra> (Emphasis supplied)

Did you catch that? Whether you know what you’re saying, or not, **a mantra may still have its effect.** Also taken from the website above, “Mantras, the Sanskrit syllables inscribed on yantras, are essentially 'thought forms' representing divinities or cosmic powers, which exert their influence by means of sound-vibrations.”

Did you know that: “A Mantrik is someone who specializes in practicing mantra?” And in India the word mantrik & similar names are synonymous with *magician* in different languages.

A Mantrik is one who chants to please a god or evil spirit for his benefit. Mantras are sacred chantings containing magical and mystical words. A Mantrik is known for his use of sorcery and magic and can be called upon for the casting of spells and magic, divination, astrology and all aspects of sorcery. ” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantrik> (Emphasis supplied)

For the Christian, this revelation should provide a whole new level of understanding about the practice of yoga, Om, and the use of mantras. So, I ask the question: “Is Yoga harmless?” And I would answer:

- Is sorcery harmless?
- Is magic harmless?
- Is mysticism harmless?
- Is entering an altered state of consciousness harmless?
- Are engaging in spiritual exercises directed at realizing your own inner divinity harmless?
- Is believing you *have* an inner divinity harmless?
- Is assuming asana postures that honor non-biblical Gods and idols irrelevant because that person’s God doesn’t happen to be your own?
- Is voicing a sacred incantation to a Hindu deity pleasing in God’s eyes?

Let’s think long and hard about what we are actually doing when Christians engage in the practice of yoga. What kind of spiritual awakening, or should I say: “spiritual sleep” may be taking place? Is it possible that instead of realizing “nirvana,” which of course is not most Christian’s goal in doing yoga, they are instead, being lulled into a state of spiritual apathy and lack of discernment? Is it possible they don’t even realize that they have actually adopted pagan practices, eastern meditation techniques, and are now involved with mysticism, sorcery and magic? Why would a Christian want to try and defend the practice of going through the motions of pagan worship and practicing pagan meditation techniques as something that is pleasing in the eyes of the Lord? This just doesn’t seem logical.

We should want Christ to rule our lives, not Karma. We should seek to fill ourselves with the Holy Spirit instead of seeking to empty ourselves – thereby allowing *other* spirits inside. The spiritual effects of yoga are very real. See the following link to read Connie Fait, former Tibetan nun, yogi, and head of a Tibetan Buddhist Temple who spent 40 years steeped in the practice and study of the yogic traditions personal account: <http://www.womenofgrace.com/blog/?tag=connie-j-fait>

Let's turn to the God of the Bible for enlightenment, not to ourselves. Let us be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ instead of seeking to become one with the universe. Let us honor and worship the Creator God of the Bible and avoid pagan and idolatrous rituals, practices, and exercises that honor non-biblical god(s). Let us be "sober and vigilant" not emptied and "open" (to another spirit); because our adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (I Peter 5:8).

Let's respond to Joshua's appeal to the Israelites when he said: "Choose you this day whom you will serve...as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15) and make a decision to turn from anything that is tied to a false God or pagan practice.

With all of this said, please finally consider an article by Suhag A. Shukla, Co-Founder/Executive Director of the Hindu American Foundation who gives a clear understanding of the Hindu position on yoga and validates much of what has been set forth in this study. On March 15, 2012, The Huffington Post's Religion section posted an opinion poll titled: "Change My Mind: Yoga Is A Hindu Practice". People either voted they agreed with this statement, or disagreed. Suhag Shukla posted her side of the debate stating her position that: "Yes, Yoga is a Hindu Practice". I would like to include her full article since it is so concise and clear about the topic at hand. Here it is.

Change My Mind: Yoga Is A Hindu Practice

By Suhag A. Shukla, Esq. Co-Founder/Executive Director, Hindu American Foundation

"We are of the view that yoga, which originates from Hinduism, combines physical exercise, religious elements, chanting and worshipping for the purpose of achieving inner peace and ultimately to be one with god."

"The bare fact is that yoga is a spiritual discipline by which the adherent is trained to use the body as a vehicle for achieving consciousness of the divine."

As a Hindu advocate and one of the several brains behind the Hindu American Foundation's Take Back Yoga Project, these statements could easily be mine or those of my colleagues' in our quest to bring to light yoga's Hindu roots. But they are not. These acknowledgements of yoga being a spiritual and Hindu discipline are actually from the most ironic of bedfellows -- Abdul Shukor Husin, chairman of Malaysia's top Islamic body, and Dr. Albert Mohler, the President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Granted, Husin and Mohler do not represent or speak for all Muslims and Christians, respectively, but their conclusions are worth considering.

As a Hindu, the answer to "Is yoga a Hindu practice?" is obvious, and demands a more important question: Why are we even having this debate? I offer three reasons: 1) The \$6 billion yoga industry's cater-to-the-masses, bottom-line delinking of yoga from Hinduism has significantly secularized, plagiarized or mutated yoga, almost beyond recognition; 2) many of the Hindu yoga gurus who have traveled to America, over-emphasized the "universal" and de-emphasized the "Hindu," in their hopes of sharing, and perhaps making more palatable for Westerners, their own profound experiences of Self-realization and the systems by which anyone could strive for the same; and 3) our American tendency to "reduce, reuse, recycle" combined with cafeteria-style spirituality and an unhealthy serving of religious illiteracy has played its part as well in muddying the waters unnecessarily. With that out of the way, onto my offering to this debate's question.

Yoga is a Hindu practice and how one arrives at this conclusion depends a great deal on how one defines yoga. I've said here before, yoga is the practice of preparing oneself to yoke, unite or experience the Divine within (i.e. Consciousness). Yoga is about attaining *chitta-vritti-nirodha* (cessation of mental fluctuations), and ultimately, *moksha*, or liberation from worldly suffering and the cycle of birth and rebirth. Yoga is a combination of both physical and spiritual discipline, the key word being "combination," with an emphasis on the spiritual. The popular understanding of yoga, however, too often begins and ends with *asana* (physical posture). The truth is that asana accounts for only a small sliver of yoga. **Nonetheless, asanas, named as they are after the many avatars of the Hindu pantheon and with their tremendous psycho-physiological and psycho-spiritual effects, have proven to be the gateway for millions into the heart of yoga**, which is a seeker-lifestyle defined by a specific philosophy and purpose.

The inter-connected, metaphysical principles that form the core of yoga are the core of Hinduism. While these principles have informed other Dharma traditions, they are quite different from the central principles of the Abrahamic traditions. **First, karma**, a universal law of cause and effect, is the mechanism by which we create karmic debits and credits through our actions (thoughts, words, deeds). Some may argue, "Well, every tradition has this 'do unto others' type Golden Rule." One of the key difference for the law of karma is that one's karmic balance sheet is zeroed out over many lifetimes.

Integral to the belief and understanding of karma then is **the second principle of samsara, or reincarnation**. Hindus believe that the immortal soul or Consciousness evolves by experiencing varied lives through a process wherein the soul takes on different physical bodies through cycles of birth and death. Any notions of eternal hells, heavens or salvation do not fit in this transcendental equation.

These two related concepts feed into a third metaphysical principle which is that Consciousness is present in all living things. What does that really mean? It means no promised land, no chosen people, no requirement to accept any one prophet, no my way or the highway --- it's just each and every one of us, regardless of how we identify our outer-selves, owning our potential to realize or experience the Divine within on a spiritual path to which we are inclined.

Christianizing, Judeo-fying or secularizing the Sanskrit terminology, or even cutting out the Oms and Namastes isn't enough of a twist to cleanse yoga of its guiding principles. Yes, the beauty of yoga is that it can be both flexible and fluid, but without its metaphysical, Hindu bones, yoga falls flat on its face.
END

Relevant Bible Texts

We are not divine; salvation is only through Jesus Christ. We will not find it through a path of personal enlightenment and self-realization because "self" is not Divine.

Romans 3:9-11

...As it is written, "There is none righteous, no, not one..."

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Jesus Himself will come again, literally, to take us to heaven. The Bible rejects the principle of reincarnation and teaches that the only way to achieve immortality is through belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. We must have faith in Him and His promises; He promises to come again and receive us to Himself. He is a personal God who cares for us and who will come again for those who believe in Him.

John 14:1-3

...”In My Father’s house are many mansions...I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

Acts 1:9-11

“...this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”

I Thessalonians. 4:16-17

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

The Bible denies an *impersonal* “life force” of creation, (Chi, Qi, Prana, Divine Consciousness) that permeates everything. Jesus is the creator and is separate and sovereign over His creation.

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

John 1:1,3,14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...

Isaiah 46: 9-10

Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me.

I Corinthians 8:6

But to us *there is* but one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *are* all things, and we by him.

Colossians 1:13-17

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible, and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All

things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

We are not to worship or bow to *any* other Gods. There is only one God whom we should serve.

Matthew 4:10

Then Jesus said to him, Away with you, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.

Deuteronomy 10:17

For the Lord your God *is* God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God...

Exodus 20: 2-6

I *am* the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Many desire salvation, but in spite of being *Christians* (who do good works in God's name) He will tell them "I never knew you." We must surrender "self". We must be willing to not only believe in Christ, but to surrender all to Him. He asks us to "do the will of His Father". This means we are to follow Christ's example in all we do. It means we are to live by the truth we've been shown and incorporate it's principles into our daily life — in all ways.

Matthew 7:21-23

Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father, which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Matthew 16:24

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

James 1:8

A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Hinduism and Eastern Religions teach the immortality of the soul, which is the original lie Satan told in the Garden of Eden. Ancient pagan religions all believed this lie and taught the soul is immortal. The Bible rejects this teaching. Only God has immortality and we will not receive it until He comes again.

I Timothy 6:15-16

“...which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, **who alone has immortality**, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power.”

Job 4:17

Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his maker?

I Corinthians 15:51-53

We shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,...and the dead shall be raised incorruptible...for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. (At the second coming of Christ)

Don't be caught with the masses in listening to the false doctrine of seducing spirits! They have strong power to deceive and the Bible says they will be successful with many.

I Timothy 4:1

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.

Revelation 16:14

For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

A Final Thought

The immortality of the soul was Satan's original lie. Surely, one of the "doctrines of devils" mentioned above is this very one that came from the serpent's mouth in Eden! Man is NOT immortal and NEVER will be like God!

So I ask, why would we want to partake of Hindu religious practice (yoga), enter their camp, so-to-speak, and practice their ways? **Are we trying to get closer to the world's way, or the way of Jesus Christ?**