

## Yoga – way to peace or deception?

Wherever you look in the western world you find the influence of yoga. Time Magazine's book 'Alternative Medicine' states about yoga in America: 'Hard to believe but yoga was once considered heretical, even dangerous. As recently as a century ago yogis in America were viewed with suspicion, some were actually thrown in jail. Today though most gyms offer it, many public schools practice it and a growing number of doctors prescribe it. It may have taken 5000 years, but yoga has arrived.'

The same could be said of the UK and Europe. The NHS advocates it with claims that yoga can help reduce stress and aid relaxation, maintain fitness, suppleness and muscle-tone, energise both mind and body. It is recommended for cancer sufferers, stroke patients and those suffering from back and neck pain, amongst other things.

Schools minister David Laws has said children in state primary and secondary schools could be trained in 'mindfulness', a growing movement based on ancient eastern traditions of meditation involving 'yoga style movements and observing sensations in moments of movement and stillness' (Daily Mail 13/3/14).

Celebrities like Madonna, Brad Pitt, Gwynyth Paltrow and Lady Gaga are among the many who advocate doing yoga. Katherine, Duchess of Cambridge, was taking private pregnancy yoga sessions in preparation for the birth of Prince George. Even the Inland Revenue used a man doing yoga in their advert to persuade people to get their tax returns in by the January 31st deadline, with a message that this would give 'peace of mind'!

Alternative-medicine guru Deepak Chopra is known world wide for courses on yoga, meditation, guided imagery and other New Age techniques used to help people deal with stress, health problems, being overweight. He has produced a meditation app which can be downloaded onto a smart phone and induces a trance state through a combination of soothing music, narration and psychedelic strobe lighting that is meant to induce a trance state in which people may see visions. One correspondent said, 'I saw several darkly clad strangers come out of a room. I tried to offer them a message of peace telepathically. They immediately circled around me and zapped me into a state of the most joy and ecstasy I have ever felt in my life.'

These teachings are infiltrating Christianity. Deepak Chopra has spoken at St James Anglican Church in London and US Saddleback megachurch, led by 'America's Pastor' Rick Warren. Saddleback church offers 'holy yoga' at the Rancho Capistrano campus. 'Holy Yoga offers the same physical and strengthening benefits as yoga BUT it is done with scripture, prayer, and worship music. These classes are great for the release of tension, core strengthening, weight loss, lowering blood pressure, and better posture.'

Yoga has also been brought into Jewish circles. The London JW3 centre offers 'Kavvanah Yoga': 'A meeting of body, mind and spirit, a fusion of yoga techniques and Jewish meditation practices ... us on a journey from Bible to Midrash, the Talmud to the Piyuttim, ... interweaved with mindfulness, pranayama (breathing) and asana (postures) to create a space for reflection, questioning and complete well-being.'

Although pleased at the penetration of yoga into western society, many Hindus are actually worried that it has become a pick and mix movement practiced by people for a variety of reasons, and removed from true Hinduism. The 'Take Back Yoga Campaign' originated in America and came to public attention with an article in the New York Times (27/11/2010) 'Yoga is practiced by about 15 million people in the United States, for reasons almost as numerous — from the physical benefits mapped in brain scans to the less tangible rewards that New Age journals call spiritual centring. Religion, for the most part, has nothing to do with it. But a group of Indian-Americans has ignited a surprisingly fierce debate in the gentle world of yoga by mounting a campaign to acquaint Westerners with the faith that it says underlies every single yoga style followed in gyms, ashrams and spas: Hinduism.'

Westerners practice yoga with the idea that it will improve their health and give them peace of mind. Yoga is often marketed as a process of achieving good health and peace of mind through the practice of physical postures. However the real purpose of yoga is to connect one's consciousness to the Supreme consciousness by controlling one's body, mind and senses.

Hatha yoga is not just a form of 'physical fitness' but is a part of the Hindu religion. Over thousands of years Hinduism has developed numerous techniques to manipulate human consciousness in order to bring about an 'altered state of consciousness' through which you supposedly connect to this Supreme consciousness. These techniques are called yoga. According to a Hindu saying, 'There is no Hinduism without yoga and no yoga without Hinduism.' Yoga therefore is much more than a means of gaining physical exercise, reducing stress or as a medical therapy.

I once talked to a yoga teacher who later became a Christian. He said that he did not teach his pupils anything about Hinduism to begin with, but simply taught them the techniques of yoga. They then experienced things that they could not explain and he interpreted their experiences in such a way that would lead them deeper into the Hindu philosophy of discovering this connection to the 'supreme consciousness' or God within yourself.

Yoga aims to liberate us from the normal human condition and to replace this with a higher state of consciousness' in which humans see themselves as divine. It aims to let the supposed 'latent element' or 'true self' within us shine out as god. This is not a connection to God as revealed in the Bible, but to the spiritual powers which are also made manifest by occult practices. In the world of the occult there is a belief in a universal energy that exists in all things. This energy can be aroused by a number of practices which take people into an altered state of consciousness, thereby gaining access into the world of occult spirituality.

In Hatha yoga body postures (asanas) are intended to immobilise the whole body. Meditation words (mantras) serve to immobilise the consciousness. Mantras are usually the names of gods used for worship. Symbolic body movements in yoga are designed to close 'all nine doors of the body', so that no sense perception from the outside penetrates into the mind. When all outer sensation is shut off the body itself will create sense perceptions of an inner kind, an inner light, an inner sound, an inner smell, and an inner pleasure.

The word yoga comes from the Sanskrit word yuj meaning to yoke or bind and is often interpreted as 'union.' Goutam Paul, author of 'Bhagavad Gita, the Ultimate Source of Yoga' says that through yoga we can be connected to the universal Supreme consciousness. He writes: 'Some may call this universal consciousness an all-pervading energy, whereas most theists consider this Supreme consciousness to be God. The purpose of Yoga is to connect the individual energy with the universal energy, or put another way, to connect the individual being to its source – the Supreme Being.'

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi says, 'Man is divine, the inner man is fully divine. Be still and know you are God. When you know you are God you will begin to live Godhood.' Swami Muktananda said, 'Kneel to your own self. Honour and worship your own being. God dwells within you as You.'

The idea that we can be 'as god' goes right back to the opening pages of the Bible where it is seen as the deception of the Devil, not the source of enlightenment. According to the Bible we do not discover God within ourselves. The Apostle Paul wrote, 'I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing.' (Romans 7.18) What people doing yoga discover within themselves is not a doorway to God, but an open door for the invasion of demonic powers which will blind them to the truth of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Bible teaches that the human problem with God is caused by our sinful nature which separates us from God and causes us to break His commandments. The solution is repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus, who came from heaven to earth, to live as a man but at the same time was God in the flesh. He died on the cross and was resurrected, paying the penalty for our sin with His own blood. We come to know God by being born again by the Holy Spirit, at which point God comes into our lives and dwells within us. Jesus said: 'Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door I will come into him and dine with him and he with Me.' (Revelation 3.20).

When we accept Jesus as Saviour we are born again by the Holy Spirit and become children of God: 'As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.' John 1.12-13. Before we take this step of faith, God is outside of our lives. After doing this He is inside our lives, dwelling within us by the Holy Spirit. We are also dwelling in Him: 'For you died (to your old life) and your life is hidden with Christ in God.' Colossians 3.3.

According to the philosophy behind yoga, humans are already divine and this divinity can be awakened by yoga. God already dwells within us, but we do not know this. We have lost contact with our innate divinity through becoming entangled in the material world and being limited by our rational finite minds. The solution is to discover the 'god within' through experiencing a higher state of expanded consciousness. Therefore the problem of humanity is not a moral one, but one of a lack of knowledge. There is no sin and therefore no need for a Saviour.

The Bible tells us 'Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.' 1 Timothy 4.1. Behind yoga there is evidence of a 'doctrine of demons' through which people do not encounter God but evil spirits or demons, giving counterfeit spiritual experiences of light and peace. These experiences convince people that they have encountered God.

Such a manifestation of evil spirits is seen in the experience recorded above of the person who encountered 'darkly clad strangers' who 'circled around me and zapped me into a state of the most joy and ecstasy I have ever felt in my life.' Paul wrote that 'Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.' So he is able to give people experiences of peace and well being which they believe are from a divine source. However in the end these experiences will lead to control by evil spirits who will seek to prevent the person they control from finding the true way to know God, through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The philosophy behind it leads back to the Garden of Eden where the serpent (Satan) planted the lie that has fuelled the world of the occult since the beginning of time - that humanity can become as God: 'You shall not die ... you will be like God.' Genesis 3.4.

The true experience of the divine comes from being born again of the Holy Spirit when we repent of our sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who died for us and rose again from the dead, overcoming sin and death and hell. He is alive today and able to meet with all who call upon His name for salvation.

For more information on this subject send for the booklet 'Yoga and Christianity' by Chris Lawson available from us for £2.50 including postage.