

The Dangers of Yoga's Stretching and Exercise Classes for Christians

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Introduction

Yoga exercise classes have become popular and have spread throughout this country. The practice has also made inroads into the Christian community, even into some churches and Christian universities and colleges. But what most Christians do not realize is that this practice is an outgrowth of non-Christian religious practice and, as such, carries with it certain spiritual influences. This document seeks to bring these influences to light and help Christians understand that these influences may not be harmless.

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A. Basic Information About Yoga Exercises

The following information is taken from several websites (in January and February of 2010) which have been footnoted. The reader can visit these websites and see for himself what they say. Generally speaking, the Internet is not a reliable source of information, but the websites cited here are all saying about the same thing, and the information they share is not held in debate nor controversial, as far as the author knows. It is just basic or general information about Yoga.

Yoga exercise classes and personal exercise regimens, such as *Hatha* or *Namaste* Yoga, are viewed by most people as being harmless, especially since the Yoga meditational practices are not being used with them. But there are less apparent factors that need to be taken into consideration. For instance, the word “Yoga” itself means “to yoke” or “to unite,” and the very purpose of Yoga is to unite or yoke oneself to the “universal consciousness” or “Brahman,” i.e. to the Hindu god, also called the “divine energy” or “divine love.”^{1 & 6}

The word “*Hatha*” itself is a combination of “*ha*,” referring to the sun, and “*tha*,” referring to the

moon. The idea is to unite the positive sun force with the negative moon force, thus producing a balance within oneself.²

Likewise, *Namaste* is a derivative of *Hatha Yoga*. The word itself is a combination of “*Nama*” (bow), and “*te*” (you); it actually refers to a gesture which means, “I bow to you” [referring to the object of worship, such as the sun, the moon, the gods, or the “divine love”]. It is performed with the eyes closed, the head bowed, while holding of the hands together over the “*chakra*” (energy channel) of the heart. Alternately, it can be performed by holding the hands over the “third eye” of the forehead, and then bringing them down over the heart (with eyes closed and head bowed). Doing this enables one to surrender to the “divine love” and increases its flow at the heart *chakra*. This gesture is usually done at the beginning and ending of a Yoga class.³

The various postures of Yoga (called “*asanas*”) have three purposes: (1) stretching; (2) opening the body’s “channels of energy” (or “*chakras*”);⁴ and (3) honoring Hindu or Buddhist gods. For instance, one common posture is called the “salutation to the sun;” another is called the “salutation to the moon;” these are essentially forms of worship of the sun and moon.⁵ Other postures are named after animals, birds, snakes, fish, and even insects, all of which are deities of Hinduism. The poses are taken in honor of these deities and can also be considered as forms of worship of these deities.⁶

Breath control is an important part of Yoga exercise classes. The purpose of breath control is to increase ones’ “life force” or “*pranic energy*,” and to control one’s state of consciousness. Holding in one’s *pranic energy* increases one’s control over his psychic centers; it also increases one’s control over the fundamental elements of the universe.⁷ *Pranic energy* is believed to be the all-pervasive life-force of the universe. It is the energy required to enable the existence of all animate and inanimate objects, as well as all their activity, if any; it also governs the laws of nature.⁸

“*Pranic energy*” is derived from the Sanskrit or Hindu word “*Prana*,” which means “life-force.”⁹ It is the same as “*ki*” in Japanese, “*chi*” in Chinese, “*pneuma*” in Greek, and “*ruah*” in Hebrew (“breath of life”). In people, *prana* pervades the body, but also extends a few inches outside the body, surrounding it, thus becoming its “*arura*.”¹⁰

There are three sources of *prana*: sun, air, and ground. Solar *prana* is absorbed into the body as sunlight. Air *prana* is absorbed by breathing. Ground *prana* is absorbed through the feet (being more readily absorbed through bare feet). Water, plants, trees, people, and animals all absorb *prana* through contact with sunlight, air, and the ground. Certain healthy or massive trees emit large amounts of *prana*. Sickly people can absorb some of this *prana* by reclining beneath these trees or by laying their hands on them, and especially by asking the tree for help. Sometimes so much *prana* can be absorbed in this manner that it can cause tingling or numbness in one’s body.¹⁰

Hence the importance of breathing rituals for absorbing air *prana* in the practice of Yoga. However, advanced breathing can cause one to encounter his own spirit or inner “self.” This can be a fearful experience because it is so alien to most people. Yet the experience may increase

one's perception, perhaps even to the point of gaining telepathic powers.⁷

Performing Yogic poses can lead to an arousal of the *Kundalini* spirit (which is a coiled snake at the base of the spine). If a person goes beyond the stretching exercises into more advanced Yoga, the snake will be stimulated to rise further up the spine of the individual. In the final stage of arousal, the third eye, believed to be in the center of the forehead, will be opened. With this third eye the individual may see frightful things, such as demons. This has caused some people to actually go insane. The opening of this third eye is known as "full enlightenment."¹¹

By the way, it is commonly believed that Yoga is a derivative of Hinduism. But actually, to some extent, the reverse is true; Yoga is centuries older than Hinduism, being a common practice in the Indus Valley before 3,000 B.C. And Hinduism, along with a few other religions, such as Buddhism, have incorporated many of its practices into their own systems.¹²

B. The Christian Interpretation of Yoga Exercises

We have just covered a few basic facts about Yoga and its exercises. Now let us try to delve beneath its exterior and see if its spiritual root can be exposed.

Yoga's "universal consciousness," "divine energy," or "divine love" are all references to the all-pervading "divine" spirit said to be the object of Hinduism, i.e. the principal god, "Brahman." According to the Bible, besides the true God and His own angels, there is only one other type of spirit which dwells in the atmosphere surrounding the earth; it is called the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4). This is none other than the spirit of Satan himself together with his minions. This spirit may be "ubiquitous" (represented in all places at all times), while the Spirit of the true God is "omnipresent" (present in all places at all times).

As related above, *Hatha* Yoga is itself named after the worship of the sun and moon. And *Namaste* Yoga has people moving their hands over special "energy channels" of the body and over the "third eye." This is supposed to help one to submit to the Brahmanic "divine love" and increase its flow in the body. This, in turn, allows the *Kundalini* spirit, or coiled serpent, to arise and move more freely within the individual. The concept of the serpent-spirit is well known in the Bible (Gen 3; Isa. 27:1; 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev 9.12-15). This can only be a reference to a demonic spirit being allowed to enter and to arise within the individual. No wonder that allowing this to happen can sometimes lead to mental instability or even insanity. The opening of the third eye is merely accomplished by this demonic spirit. God Himself has also been known to do this on occasion (see 2 Kings 6:17), but the terminology is different: there is no concept of a "third eye" in Christian thought. When God lets His people see spiritual things, He opens their "eyes," plural, i.e., both spiritual eyes (2 Kings 6:17; Acts 26:18; Eph. 1:18). There is also a difference in what may be seen when the devil opens eyes, since he does so in order to terrify people by letting them see demons; he does not let them see God's angels in the vicinity. The more frightened and unstable a person is, the easier it is to influence or control him. It is not unusual for people on bad drug trips and schizophrenics to see demonic spirits. Conversely, when God opens the spiritual eyes of an individual, He often reveals His powerful and beautiful angels. He does also

on occasion reveal the presence of demons, but when He does so, these are revealed in a non-threatening or secure manner. God does not want His people to be terrified, but to be reassured, stable, and confident; such a mind is more difficult to be influenced by unclean spirits.

It was mentioned above that when practicing advanced breathing exercises, one might encounter his own inner self or inner spirit, an experience so alien that it can terrify the individual. But the fact is that *no one is afraid of himself!* One's own inner self or spirit is the essence of what the person is, so no one would be afraid of his own human spirit. Neither would seeing one's own spirit be an alien experience because one's own spirit looks exactly like oneself, only in a non-physical form. Remember that on the mount of transfiguration there were two people who meet Jesus, neither of whom were still living on the earth at the time (Matt. 17:1-3): one was Moses and the other was Elijah. Moses had been dead for hundreds of years, so what appeared there on the mountain could only have been his spirit. Elijah, on the other hand, had not died, but had been taken bodily to heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:11). So Moses appeared as a spirit, and Elijah appeared as a glorified man, but both were recognizable by the apostles (even though they had never seen them before); neither of these had any weirdness about them; neither were terrifying or alien in any way. So what these Yoga practitioners were seeing was probably something other than their own inner selves, something other than their own human spirits: it was that *Kundalini* spirit, that coiled snake at the base of the spine, now uncoiled, and staring them in the face from within. This is what they have aroused within themselves through the practice of Yoga.

This whole idea of *prana* or *pranic* energy is a Hindu concept. It may be equivalent to the *ki* in Japanese or the *chi* in Chinese, but it is certainly NOT equivalent to the *pneuma* in Greek or the *ruah* in Hebrew (alternately spelled *ruach* or *ruwach*). While *pneuma* and *ruach* (both Biblical terms) can refer to breath, air, wind, or spirit, they do not refer to all of these at the same time. In other words, when these words are used in reference to the human spirit, they do not also refer to the wind or to breath: it is one or another, not to both at the same time. A wind is not a human spirit, and a spirit is not a wind; they may be similar, but not equivalent. So when *pneuma* or *ruach* are used to refer to a human being, they refer to the human spirit that is confined within the borders of his body. This is to say that neither of these words have anything to do with the "all-pervasive life-force of the universe." Nor does the human spirit extend a few inches outside the human body, surrounding it, becoming one's aura. A Christian may have an aura that surrounds him, but that is the Light of the Holy Spirit, not *pranic* energy. The aura surrounding the Yogic adherent must be produced by the *Kundalini* spirit that has been allowed to arise within. So there is a very important difference between these two types of aura.

That is why breath control is so important in the practice of Yoga; holding in one's breath is retaining more of Hinduism's *prana*, thus increasing one's *pranic* energy. It is interesting that Yoga teaches that *prana* is absorbed from various inanimate sources through touching and even talking to the trees [we could say, praying to them]; doing so increases the absorption rate, or so they claim. This explains the practice of "tree-hugging" and bare-foot walking on the part of new-agers. All of this is for the purpose of enhancing Hindu spiritual influences within one's body.

As mentioned above, *prana* is the same as the Chinese *chi*. It is by this power or force that (apparent) superhuman feats are sometimes demonstrated by the adherents, some of which have been demonstrated on TV, such as levitation, etc. Though there is a great deal of fraud and trickery involved in the performance of these stunts, some appear to be genuine. These feats could only be accomplished through demonic power, which *pranic* energy is essentially.

Hinduism has hundreds of gods, including that of the sun, moon, many animals, reptiles, fish, insects, etc. Yoga's stretching exercises, or postures, are all forms of worship of these gods. It does not matter if a person is aware of this fact or not; being unaware, or being deceived, does not excuse anyone. Eve may have been "deceived" in Genesis 3 (i.e., she did not really understand what she was doing), but this did not excuse her; she was still counted as being a transgressor (1 Tim. 2:13). Even in civil law, being ignorant of a law does not excuse anyone when they break the law; the individual is still counted as being guilty. So performing postures which honor the Hindu or Buddhist idols or gods can hardly be overlooked by the true God who describes Himself as being very jealous when it comes to the worship of these other gods:

You shall not make for yourself a graven 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; 5 you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God (Ex 20:4-5)

The Bible says that there are demonic spirits associated with idol worship. Here are a few passages that point this out (underlines mine):

Deut 32:17: They sacrificed to demons which were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come in of late, whom your fathers had never dreaded.

Ps 106:36-38: They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood.

1 Cor 10:18-20: Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God.

Rev 9:20: The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot either see or hear or walk

1 Tim 4:1: Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.

Hinduism is filled with idols. Idol worship is also an important part of Buddhism. Nature

worship and astrology (the worship of the heavenly bodies like the sun, moon, etc.) are also part of these religions. And even beyond this, the Bible says that when the world turns to religion, since it is usually of the non-Christian and non-Jewish (i.e. non-Biblical) form, it is actually Satan that they are worshiping. Regardless of what they call their god, it is Satan who is “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4; see also Matt. 4:8) and the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; meaning the world of fallen mankind; see also Eph 2:2; 6:12; 1 John 5:19).

Since Yoga definitely has of non-Christian and non-Jewish origin, and is, in fact, intimately connected with Hinduism, Buddhism, and other similar religions, anyone who takes part in any kind of Yogic practice is putting himself under the influence of the spirits of these religions. But the problem is that most people, and that includes most Christians, do not know what a spirit actually is. Intellectually they know that a spirit is an unseen, intelligent entity, a non-physical force or influence. But they do not know what a spirit is *experientially*; they do not know what a spirit actually *feels* like, nor have they ever knowing encountered a spirit. So we could ask, what does a spirit feel like? Actually, it feels like God. That is because all spirits are made of the same stuff, i.e., spiritual substance, the same stuff of which God consists. God, angels, and demons are all spiritual entities; they are all spirits, be they good or evil, be they of the highest part of heaven or the lowest part of hades. They all *feel* divine because that is what spirits feel like. It is similar in the natural world: all men are made of the same stuff. So when a person meets a man for the first time, usually he cannot tell if the man is good or evil; he has to get acquainted with the man to find out, and sometimes even then one does not really know. Likewise, for the inexperienced, just coming into contact with a spirit may not, in itself, reveal the nature of that spirit; it may take time to discover its essence, assuming, of course, that the person even recognizes that it *is* a spirit, and not just some “energy” or “feeling.” If ever seen, demonic spirits may *look* hideous, but they do not *feel* hideous – at least, not usually, and especially not initially. And we know that a spirit can cloak its true nature by transforming itself into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), thus making their identification difficult for anyone, not just for those who lack discernment.

The problem is that the people of the world judge practices on how it makes them *feel*. They say things like, “How can anything that *feels* so right, be so wrong?” when speaking of illicit sex or drugs. Another popular expression of worldly philosophy is, “If it *feels* good, do it; if it hurts, let it go.” Feelings are important, and do help when judging things; but the world judges things on the basis of feelings of sensual pleasure. But there are other kinds of feelings, such as feelings of right and wrong, as one listens to one’s conscience; there are feelings of moral cleanness or filthiness; there are feelings of honesty and integrity as opposed to feelings of decrepitness. We just need to understand that there is a difference between sensual feelings and higher feelings of the soul or spirit.

When it comes to feelings, the ancient Greeks also had problems discerning the feelings they might experience. They had two words for the gods which they worshiped: these words, and their definitions, are:

δαίμων (*daimon*): “1. In Grk. auth. *a god, a goddess; an inferior deity*, whether good or bad ... 2. In the N.T. *an evil spirit*” (Thayer 124).

δαίμόνιον (*daimonion*): “1. *the divine Power, deity, divinity 2. a spirit, a being inferior to God, superior to men ... in both a good sense and a bad ... But elsewhere in the Scripture used ... of evil spirits*” (Thayer 123).

When translated into English, this is how these words are rendered: “demon.” To the Greeks, these spirits *felt* like gods, so they *were* gods. Somewhere it is written that what the Greeks worshiped as gods, the early Christians called demons, and cast them out of their priests. It is not different today; the spirits have not changed, nor have people changed; the spirits still feel like gods, and people still think that this is what they are. So it is very easy to get involved with something that *feels* good, that *feels* like God, but actually is not God at all, with the individual being completely unaware of this fact. For a person to submit to the name of “Yoga,” to enter into poses meant to honor the eastern gods and to clear the internal channels, to practice breathing rituals which increases one’s *pranic* energy, all of which are meant to invoke the *Kundalini* spirit and allow it to move more freely within, is to place oneself under the influence of these “god-like,” yet demonic, spirits.

To restate this idea in other words, when encountering either a good or bad spirit, initially both may feel alike. They all may give a person a sense of the divine, a sense of power, a sense of coming into contact with something bigger than oneself. There may be a sense of euphoria, of exhilaration, perhaps of timelessness, of peace. There may even be feelings of electricity flowing within or through one’s body. God’s Spirit brings with Him a sense of calmness, of quietness, and of a strong sense of love (not weak love, but strong love; not a hippie “free” love, but an exquisitely clean love; Gal. 5:22-23). The Holy Spirit may also bring a sense a peace that centers in the core of the heart, and emanates from the heart of the person. Furthermore, He may also bring a stability of the mind, thus producing a rational or sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7, KJV), and a sense of absolute moral and ethical cleanness (Jam. 3:17). This is why He is called the *Holy Spirit*.

By contrast, the Yoga spirits emanate from the base of the spine and work their way upward through the body in time, working towards the mind, as the person subjects himself to progressively deeper occult activity. Sometimes these spirits may even explode upward through the spine, feeling like a rush of energy flowing through the body. They also give a sense of euphoria, exaltation, and power as they move up from the base of the spine. Buddhist and Hindu spirits can also bring with them a sense of peace, but it is a different kind of peace. It surrounds the person and insinuates itself inwardly (the reverse of the Holy Spirit’s peace which starts from within and works itself outward). In time, it can lead to mental instability and even a fracturing of the stability of the ego, rather similar to what LSD does to the mind of the users.

At this point, let us consider the following: the Bible tells us that the devil does, in fact, presently accuse Christians *in heaven*: “who *accuses* them day and night *before* our God” (Rev 12:10). This portion of the verse is written in the *present* tense, meaning that it is still on going. Many Christians believe that Satan was cast out of heaven at the cross, 2,000 years ago. But the whole chapter, Revelation 12, does not speak of the past, but is a revelation of what will happen in the future, when the great war in heaven takes place. Further confirmation of this point can be seen in the next verse (Rev. 12:11), which says that believers have “conquered him by the *blood of the*

Lamb and by the word of *their testimony*.” The use of the “blood” of Christ and of the Christian “testimony” refer to post-cross activities. This does not refer to Christ’s own victory over Satan at the cross; it refers to those who have themselves overcome the devil by believing in the Son of God, and retaining that belief in the face of whatever the world and the devil might throw at them (1 Jn. 2:13-14). (See volume I of “*Can a Christian Have an Unclean Spirit*” by the author for a full discussion of this point.)

There is actually another case in which an evil spirit was in heaven. In this case it was a “lying spirit” in the mouth of several of God’s prophets which occasioned the fall of Ahab, the evil king of Israel (1 Kings 22, 2 Chron 18). God permits these evil spirits to be in heaven, not only because they are still angels, but also because He uses them to carry out His purposes. This point shows not only that these spirits can be in heaven, but that they can also influence God’s own prophets at times.

At any rate, the point here is that the accusations of Satan take place before the throne of God *in heaven*. An actual case is presented in Job 1:6 and is repeated in Job 2:1:

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself *before the Lord*. (2:1 italics mine)

Satan may be a fallen angel, but he is still an angel, and as such is required to present himself before the Lord periodically, as are all the other angels of God. This probably applies to the higher echelon angels, the “principalities and powers” (Eph. 3:10; 6:12), not to the lesser spirits. Nor does it matter that these passages in 1 Kings and Job are from the Old Testament, before the cross of Christ, because, as pointed out, Satan still has access to heaven in post-cross times.

So even in modern times, if Christians are “dabbling” in the occult, which Yoga exercises are, then that gives Satan the right to accuse them before God and to exercise limited influence over them. In the heavenly court, Jesus tries to intercede for his people (Rom. 8:34; 1 Jn. 2:1), but what can He say? He has to admit that they have willingly submitted themselves to the Yogic influence and He cannot, or rather, will not, overrule their will – even if they are deceived and do not fully realize what they are doing.

And as mentioned, some churches and Christian colleges are actually permitting Yoga classes to take place within them. They think that this must be safe because they believe that the devil cannot enter into their churches. But which is holier: a church, or heaven? Is not heaven? But if it has been possible for unclean spirits to be in heaven (past and present), then it is possible for them to be in churches and Christian colleges. Furthermore, possessed people have spirits in them, and they can enter churches or colleges with problems. So if these churches and colleges are voluntarily subjecting themselves to these spirits through the medium of Yoga exercises, how can they think that they are immune simply because they are a Christian or in a church?

If anyone would like to know what deception is like, take a look at “harmless” Yoga exercises. People say that there does not appear to be anything wrong with them; indeed, they appear to be good because people benefit from their practice. They make people feel good, puts them in better

physical condition, relieves stress, etc. But an adequate evaluation sometimes requires a closer look for any subtle, unseen, or delayed effects that might be involved. Take the forbidden fruit of Genesis 3 for example: did not Eve benefit from eating the fruit, at least in the short term? The fruit *looked* good, *seemed* good, and *was* good – in many ways: “So when the woman saw that the tree was *good* for food, and that it was a *delight* to the eyes, and that the tree was to be *desired* to make one wise ...” (Gen. 3:6, italics mine). Not only that, but the fruit apparently also *tasted* good, or she would not have offered it to her husband. Furthermore, it actually brought with it the added benefit of gaining special knowledge which they did not previously possess: did it not “open their eyes” (vs. 7)? So, the eating of the forbidden fruit did, in fact, bring with it many benefits; the ill effects of doing so were either unseen or temporarily delayed. The fact is that *all* religions do benefit the adherents, and that includes Buddhism, Hinduism, and all the others, even Wicca or Witchcraft. They all bring with them a sense of power, of some kind of peace, the sense of partaking in something bigger than oneself, of belonging to a belief system upon which one may base one’s life. These are systems of belief by which people live. If all of these religions did not benefit the adherents in at least some ways, then they would not be practicing them. But in that millions of people do cling to them does, in fact, mean that they *do* benefit from them. All these people practice these religions without any *apparent* ill effects. We see these people walking around our cities; with few exceptions, they look and act normal; nor could they be picked out in a crowd; that is because they *are* normal. So, again, the fact that the participants of Yoga exercise classes apparently benefit from them and seem to suffer no apparent negative effects should not, in itself, be the deciding factor of whether Yoga is actually a good thing.

Is it possible for a Christian to get involved in Yoga exercises and seem to have no *apparent* ill affects? Yes, of course it is. But it is also possible to play with fire and not get burned, or to play Russian Roulette without suffering any ill effects, or to take drugs without noticing any problems – at least at first. In fact, it may be fun to play with fire, or to play Russian Roulette, or to take drugs. It may also be fun to participate in Yoga classes. But ... just because someone does not *notice* any problems, does not mean that none are happening. The Bible says that those who serve other gods will pay a price; that spirit may implant some negative influence or do some harm to them (Jer. 7:5-6). Spiritual influences can be very subtle, and can even affect Christians, contrary to popular opinion, since they willingly subject themselves to these influences. Yes, it is possible to pick up influences which attach themselves to, or even enter into, people without these people immediately realizing what is happening, such as: a headache, an ailment, a phobia, an obsession; a different “attitude;” a sexual affect; a loosening of the morals; or a diminished desire to read the Bible, pray to Christ, or attend church. As said, this “influence” may be subtle at first, but could grow in time, depending on the degree of involvement in the occult. And because it grows slowly, the individual may not be aware of what is going on. But in time, this “influence” may become more apparent, at least to others. We have all known individuals, or seen them on TV, who have changed over the years through long-term practice of the occult: perhaps their hair length has changed, or their eyes, faces, and personalities have changed. That some kind of “joining” or “uniting” (between the people and these spiritual influences) occurs with the practice of these stretching classes should not be surprising since that is what the term “Yoga” means.

And there does seem to be some sexual element involved in Yoga stretching classes; at least, sexual modesty does not seem to be paramount in these classes. In Hinduism sexuality is overt and themes of nudity and sexual intercourse abound in the statues and gods of this religion. In fact, sexual organisms are used as a means to connect the individual with the gods. The same can also be said of Buddhism, although to a lesser degree. On a TV special about Yoga, one leader claimed that Yoga was important in keeping his family together (i.e., himself, his wife, and two children); all were avid practitioners of Yoga. However, this same man later deserted his family in order to practice Yoga with another woman, one which was more “full figured.”

We cannot always judge things by “feelings.” Yoga may “feel” okay, but that is not always the best test of whether something is safe or not. Remember the story of Gideon? In Judges 6 it is explained that God gave Israel into the power of the Midianites as a form of judgment because all the evil and sins the people had done. When the Israelites cried out to God to deliver them from the Midianites, God sent a prophet which told them that, basically, God was fed up with them because He had delivered them so many times previously and they always went back to their sinful ways thereafter (vs. 7-12). But finally, God did respond and did send an angel to Gideon to call him to become a deliverer for Israel. One thing that Gideon said in reply is of interest:

And Gideon said to him, "Pray, sir, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this befallen us? And where are all his wonderful deeds which our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Mid'ian." (Judg 6:13)

Gideon’s question reveals how most people felt at that time; neither he, nor they, had any idea as to why all these troubles had befallen them. Most of them had forgotten all about the commandments of God not to worship idols and all the judgments that came upon them earlier for having done so. Not only that, but they never “felt” like anything was amiss. They were worshipping their idols, and were, more or less, happy about life, until this turn of events happened. So because they did not “feel” like anything was wrong with their worshipping idols, did not mean that everything was okay – it wasn’t, but they could not “feel it.”

Also, remember the modern story of Jeffrey Dalmar, the serial killer? He had been raised in a good, Christian home. So when, in time, he came to commit his first murder, he was shocked that nothing happened as a result; there was no judgment from God and no other indication given to him that what he had done was something very bad in the eyes of God. So, relieved, he continued his obsessive work. But this is another example of how one might “feel” like nothing is wrong when, in fact, it is. Of course, psychopaths do not have feelings of remorse, but they are a “different breed.” At any rate, we cannot always rely on our “feelings” to tell us right from wrong; we must, instead, rely on what God’s Word tells us.

Furthermore, Yoga stretching exercises are to eastern religions as marijuana is to the drug culture. Both serve as gateways or entry-level practices which could introduce the users to more malignant forms of these practices. Most people who have become drug-addicts started with the “harmless” marijuana. And many who are now deeply involved in Yoga meditation started with

“harmless” Yoga stretching classes – and that includes some Christians who claim that they are practicing “Christian Yoga.” But there is no such thing.

In New Testament times, there were similar concerns about Christians participating in seemingly harmless pagan events:

Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? 19 What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. (1 Cor 10:18-21)

The apostle Paul is speaking about Christians who have been invited by friends to attend pagan festivals held in honor of a Greek or Roman god. They might do so innocently, with no intention of entering into any worship of the pagan gods, nor even to honor them. But their very presence and participation in the feast itself was deemed by Paul to be a participation in the “table of demons.” (This is not the same thing as buying and eating food in the market places that had been previously offered to idols, an issue he covers in 1 Cor. 8.)

Also, consider the oriental practice of offering incense to their ancestors. All the participants do is take a little stick of incense, light it, place it into an incense bowl in front of some idol, give two or three quick bows, and that is all. Or how about merely offering incense to a statue of Buddha? Both of these seem harmless enough. People who do so do not have horns immediately grow out of their heads, nor do their eyes turn blood-red, nor do their faces change into some kind of demonic visage. No, a person may notice nothing at all. But what goes on in the spiritual realm is not always seen or felt in the natural realm. Our authority or standard for judging what is right or wrong, for what is good or bad, is not our feelings nor what we can or cannot see; our standard for making all such judgments is the Word of God. And the Bible says that doing any of these things is making offerings to demons.

Likewise, Christians may join Yoga stretching classes innocently enough, but their very presence in an activity which takes place in the name of “yoking one to the universal consciousness,” using poses that are essentially rituals designed to honor various deities, and practicing breathing rituals which are designed to enhance those “divine” influences within, can certainly be called a participation in rudimentary occultic activity. It is like Christians who have a Buddhist statue in their backyards. They may not bow down and worship it, nor burn incense in front of it, but it is still an idol which belongs to a non-Christian religion. Having one gives Satan the right to exercise limited influence over the household through that idol. And in heaven, before God, Satan can make certain demands to exercise influence in the home through that idol. Whether the owner is aware of any influence or not, or can or cannot see any problems here, is beside the point. Spiritual influences are invisible and do not readily reveal their presence. As said above, demonic spirits are associated with idols, whether or not the idols are worshiped. So, any home that willingly (or even unknowingly) has idols on their premises is opening the door to some kind of limited influence. And, of course, a Christian who bows down and worships a Buddhist

idol is not a Christian, regardless of what he calls himself. Jesus Himself said that “no man can serve two masters,” and that is not just applicable to money (Matt. 6:24).

Taking the whole Bible into consideration, what is the one thing that God absolutely does not tolerate? Is it not the breaking of the first and most basic commandment, “you shall have no other gods before me” (Deut. 5:7)? Put another way, which of the Ten Commandments are the most important? Is not the *first* one the most important (actually, the first two)? (Ex 20:3-6; Deut 5:7-10):

3 You shall have no other gods before me.

4 You shall not make for yourself a graven 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; 5 you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Notice that these two come before ALL OTHER commandments. They come before lying, stealing, fornication, adultery, kidnapping, and even murder. In other words, all these other things are not quite as offensive to God as someone who worships another god. For Him, that is “the last straw.”

Take the life of Solomon for example. The fact is that God let him get away with violating several of His commandments, such as not having many horses, not collecting a lot of gold and silver, and not marrying foreign women (Deut 17:14-17; Solomon’s violation of these are recorded in 1 Kings 4:26; 10:21, 11:1-3). He even “got away with” making offerings (to God) at the illegitimate high places instead of at the tabernacle (1 Kings 3:3). God was willing to overlook all these minor violations, but when Solomon allowed his foreign wives to influence him, to get him to bow his knees to their gods, he had gone too far (Deut 17:14-17). It was at this point that Solomon was said to be participating in “what was evil in the sight of the Lord” (1 Kings 11:6), and God began to work against him and to judge him, he and his nation. So for Christians to get involved with the religious rituals or practices of other religions, is to do so not only at their own spiritual jeopardy, but that of their entire households as well. It is one thing to commit minor offenses, such as momentarily allowing impure thoughts into one’s mind, or to harbor bitterness towards someone else for a short period of time, or to engage in gossip now and then; but it is an entirely different matter in God’s eyes to bow the knees in honor of another god, such as to take poses or postures in honor of these gods. And for a Christian woman to put her unborn child under the influence of Yoga spirits by practicing these exercises when pregnant is remarkably naive. As the ancient mariner maps used to say about the outskirts of the known world, “Beyond here there be dragons!” This is a pertinent warning to any and all Christians treading beyond Biblical bounds.

Now, does this mean that any Christian who offers incense to the ancestors or who takes part in a Yoga class is going to hell? Well, are we talking about an isolated event or a habitual life-style? Someone who plays with fire may get burnt, but there is a difference between getting one’s

fingers burnt and getting one's entire body burnt. But if one knows it is a violation of the first and primary commandment of God, why take the risk? Which is more important: the type of exercise one does or his relationship with God? Are there no other types of exercises that one can do beside Yoga? Of course, there are many types of exercise classes one may join that have nothing to do with eastern religions.

Generally speaking, let us understand this: there is the physical world; there is also the unseen, spiritual world. If not, then there is no God, no angels, no demons, no heaven, and no hell. But Christians (and adherents to most other religions as well) know that the whole spiritual realm does exist. The fact is, angels are everywhere; but when was the last time one saw an angel or even felt one? Also, demons are everywhere; but when was the last time one saw a demon or even felt one of those? Because one may not have seen or felt angels, demons, or even God Himself, does that mean that they do not exist? This is because being unseen is what characterizes the unseen or spiritual world. Some people have sensed a heavy, dark atmosphere in some places, such as at a "heavy metal" rock concert or certain bars. Likewise, some people have been in a place where they have sensed a light, buoyant, positive atmosphere, such as at churches or other Christian gatherings. People can often sense the difference in these opposite kinds of atmospheres, but they do not understand that these "atmospheres" are not only the influence of these spirits, but they *are* these spirits. Of course, not all "atmospheres" are spirits, but many are. Sometimes one may even feel these atmospheres change in a matter of a few moments when certain activities change.

We should understand that there are certain practices or behaviors that draw these spirits towards oneself. We should understand that there are certain religious practices that draw in the Spirit of God, such as worship, prayer, reading of the Bible, and moral and ethical behavior. Likewise, we should also understand that there are certain practices that draw in unclean spirits, such as idol worship, any non-Christian, non-Jewish, or pagan religious practice, as well as immoral and unethical behavior. So with Yoga exercise classes: unclean spirits may not have been seen, and it is possible that they may not even be felt; but the Bible tells us that they may be there, that they are summoned by these practices. Though most people have never seen any of these things, there are some who have, both Christians and non-Christians. To deny this is to deny the realities of the spiritual world.

Think about this: is there such a thing as the "spirit of Christmas?" During the Christmas celebrations, can people feel anything different about this season? Is the spirit of Christmas the same thing as the Spirit of Christ? If the answer to all these questions is yes, then we need to understand this: the Spirit of Christmas influences (to one degree or another) all people involved in the celebration, even if they have no religious intentions, even if they are doing it in a strictly non-religious manner, even if they are pagans or members of another religion. Atheists, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims all come under a little influence from the Spirit of Christmas if they engage in this holiday celebration, whether or not they intend for this to happen; whether or not they are aware of it. The same is true of Yoga: Christians who practice what is essentially a form of Hinduism cannot prevent their own spirits from coming under the influence (to one degree or another) of the spirit of Hinduism and/or the spirit of Yoga.

Doubtless some Christians will still object, claiming that Yoga is harmless. But how do they know? Let them answer these questions: have they drifted away from serving the Lord? How much time do they spend reading the Bible, or do they read it at all? How much time do they spend in prayer, or do they pray at all? Compare that with how much time they spend in Yoga meditation or exercises. Which is truly the object of their attention? Again, we cannot serve two masters; we must choose one or the other.

Endnotes:

1. http://www.pmbclansing.org/Ministries/Calvary_Class/PDFs/Religions/App_C.pdf
2. <http://yoga.iloveindia.com/yoga-types/hatha-yoga.html>
3. <http://www.yogajournal.com/basics/822>
4. <http://www.yogabasics.com/yoga-postures.html>
5. <http://www.hathayogalesson.com>
6. <http://kimolsen.wordpress.com/2009/02/22/yoga-a-christian-perspective>
7. <http://www.hathayogalesson.com>
8. <http://www.openexchange.org/features/OND09/co.html>
9. <http://www.yourhandscanhealyou.com/what-pranic-healing%C2%AE>
10. <http://www.lifepositive.com/body/energy-healing/pranic-healing/pranic-healing.asp>
11. <http://www.aboutchristiansingles.com/general-discussion/be-aware-of-the-dangers-of-yoga/?action=printpage> Here a space has been placed between the “/” and the “?” in order to get this web address to fit on this page.]
12. <http://www.americanyogaassociation.org/general.html>

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Thayer, Joseph Henry. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976. According to the publisher, this work is in the Public Domain.

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