

Posture to Apostasy

Can yogic practices be integrated with the Christian faith?

"Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the Lord. For Thou [O Lord] hast abandoned Thy people, the house of Jacob, because they are filled with influences from the east . . ." Isaiah 2:5-6, NASB

"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet . . ." Rudyard Kipling's words accent the difference between eastern and western spirituality, between Hinduism and Christianity. But the two, "the twain" as it were, are now meeting via yogic practices promoted in various places of worship and activities of spirituality. Take, for example, one Jewish synagogue. The weekly Shabbat services of Congregation Beth-El Zedek have included such activities as "Torah Yoga," which asks congregants to "stretch and take deep breaths" as the Torah is read, or when as worshippers enter the synagogue, they are "welcomed by Torah meditations set to drums and chanting." [1] But Jews are not alone in adopting yogic postures and practices.

"Christian yoga" is also gaining popularity. A few years ago, Thomas Nelson, a Christian publisher, released a book titled, *Yoga for Christians*, by Susan Bordenkircher. [2] In an interview with the *Denver Post*, the author, a fitness instructor, explained, "What we are attempting to do with a Christ-centered practice is fill the heart and mind with God, becoming 'single-minded' as Scripture calls it." [3] Unapologetic for promoting so called "Christian yoga," she explains:

Christ-centered yoga is definitely not just a repackaging of . . . yoga. The difference, she says, lies in the intention: shifting the focus from self to God with yogic postures ("breathing in" the Holy Spirit, for instance), integrating health as critical to effective godly service, and slowing down enough "from our fast-paced lives to actually hear God's voice." [4]

Wow . . . "breathing in the Holy Spirit . . . slowing down . . . to actually hear the voice of God." The instructor's words betray an ominous and foreboding ignorance of Christian truth.

Believers do not breathe in the Holy Spirit. When by faith people are justified (i.e., saved), in a millisecond of time they are regenerated (John 3:3, 5-7), and instantly indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. Corporately and individually, believers are the "temple" of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). As Paul wrote to the Roman believers, "**However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him**" (Romans 8:9). There are only two types of persons in the world: *saints and ain'ts*--those in whom the Holy Spirit lives, and those in whom He does not. Given the Spirit's abiding presence in the life of the believer, how then can He be inhaled into the soul via yogic practice? Answer: He can't, because at salvation the Holy Spirit makes the

justified believer's soul His sanctuary! Hopefully this yoga instructor isn't suggesting that regeneration takes place by a sort of yogic "inbreathing" of the Holy Spirit. If she really is, then by adding a human mechanism (i.e., "breathing in") for salvation, her version of spirituality stands in blatant contradiction to the salvation that comes "**by grace . . . through faith**" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Her spirituality formula also opposes Jesus' testimony that like the wind, the Sovereign Spirit blows when and where He "wishes" (John 3:8). The Sovereign Spirit will not be manipulated or controlled by yogic "inbreathing."

Additionally, practicing yoga with a view to hearing a mystical "voice of God" is anti-scriptural. Does the yoga instructor mean to suggest that yogic practices actually prepare people to "hear the voice of God"? Is not the Word of God mediated through the Son and Scriptures adequate? (See Hebrews 1:1-2a.). Does she really mean to say that yogic practices become a conduit through which to hear God speak? Incredible! That's not Christianity. That's the eastern mysticism of New Age religion. Embracing yoga with a view to hearing God's voice denigrates the sufficiency of Scripture in the Christian life (2 Timothy 3:16), and opens a Pandora's Box out of which every "**wind of doctrine**" will blow (Ephesians 4:14).

Christianity cannot be integrated with yoga and remain Christian. To think otherwise mindlessly imperils the Christian truth and faith. As the managing editor of *Hinduism Today*, Sannyasin Arumugaswami, remarks:

Hinduism is the soul of yoga 'based as it is on Hindu Scripture and developed by Hindu sages. Yoga opens up new and more refined states of mind, and to understand them one needs to believe in and understand the Hindu way of looking at God. . . . A Christian trying to adapt these practices will likely disrupt their own Christian beliefs'. [5]

Wedded to the Hindu system of philosophy and psychology, Yoga refers to "the mystical union with the universal spirit." [6] Yoga practices are meant to aid practitioners experience oneness with the cosmos.

Associated with the Classical Yoga Hindu Academy, an instructor named Danda likewise stated:

Is Yoga a religion that denies Jesus Christ? Yes. Just as Christianity denies the Hindu Maha Devas such as Siva, Vishnu, Durga and Krishna, to name a few, Hinduism and its many Yogas have nothing to do with God and Jesus (though we do respect that others believe in this way). As Hindus who live the Yogic lifestyle, we appreciate when others understand that all of Yoga is all about the Hindu religion. Modern so-called 'yoga' is dishonest to Hindus and to all non-Hindus such as the Christians. [7]

East is east, and west is west, and if Christianity is to remain Christian, "the twain," meaning yoga and Christianity, should never be integrated. The soul that is engaged to Jesus Christ cannot commit spiritual harlotry by flirting with the yogic practices intended to introduce them to Hindu gods. As John the Apostle wrote: "**Little children, guard yourselves from idols**" (1 John 5:21).

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Paul, 2 Corinthians 6:17-18, KJV

ENDNOTES

- [1] Robert King, "Torah Yoga? If it draws Jews closer to their faith," *The Indianapolis Star*, 12 April 2006, 1A.
- [2] Susan Bordenkircher, *Yoga for Christians* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006) Paperback, 224 pages.
- [3] Bordenkircher quoted by Darryl E. Owens, "'Christian yoga' strikes a new pose," *DenverPost.com*, Thursday, May 18, 2006. Online at: http://www.denverpost.com/lifestyleles/cj_3819655.
- [4] Ibid.
- [5] Ibid. quoting Sannyasin Arumugaswami. Apparently, Owens' article quoting Arumugaswami first appeared in the *Olando Sentinel*, May 14, 2006. See Laurette Willis, "Why a Christian ALTERNATIVE to Yoga?" Praise Moves. Online at: <http://praisemoves.com/about-us/why-a-christian-alternative-to-yoga/>.
- [6] Kurt E. Koch, *Occult Practices and Beliefs: A Biblical Examination from A to Z* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1971):123.
- [7] Danda, of the Dharma Yoga Ashram (Classical Yoga Hindu Academy, www.classicalyoga.org) located in Manahawkin, New Jersey, in a personal e-mail to the Lighthouse Trails Research Project. Used with permission.