

Is it okay for Christians to practice yoga?

Dear Roger,

I know some Christians involved in yoga. Is this okay?

Brianna

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Dear Brianna,

Probably not.

Though I know next to nothing about yoga, I am aware it was originally intended as a technique to facilitate Transcendental Meditation (TM). Westerners use it as an exercise to relieve stress and attain a peaceful state of mind.

A friend who is a former practitioner of TM, explained that the idea is to empty the mind in order to *transcend* the present reality and receive into oneself the mystical forces of the universe. Doing this corrects the unbalanced forces caused by life's struggles.

She stressed that during the TM sessions, something indeed was happening beyond emptying the mind. Something was coming in. That was the part that alarmed her.

To endorse the practice of yoga by Christians, I would need these questions answered:

- Why would a Christian want to indulge in a practice central to Hinduism, the most idolatrous and demonic religion known to man?

*...be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing.
2Cor.6:17 (ESV)*

- Why would a Christian want to empty his or her mind when the word of God commands us to fill it with thoughts of God?

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Is.26:3

The teaching of scripture about the use of the believer's mind is the exact opposite of TM. In Christianity, we obtain peace by doing a conscious activity, prayer.

...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phil. 4:6-7

- Why would a Christian want to think of nothing when the word of God gives us specific things to think about?

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Phil.3:8

- Why would a Christian want to practice something fundamentally contrary to a biblical worldview?

In mysticism, reality is divided into separate spheres, like the two stories of a building. On the bottom floor is the tangible world of matter, logic and fact. While this bottom level is solid, it contains no spirituality, meaning or moral values.

The upper story is ethereal and non-rational where a sense of meaning and moral values can be found, if one can attain to that level. The only thing to discuss is the best technique for reaching the upper story.

If this worldview were correct, the most obvious thing one must do is find a way to escape the lower story. This means bypassing logic, fact, reason and the entire material reality. Yoga and TM come in as a technique to accomplish that.

We call this view of reality, *mysticism*. Although some Christians throughout history have held to this worldview, it is totally pagan and anti-biblical.

In the Bible, both domains are inseparably mixed. There is no upper story. This is illustrated in the incarnation of Jesus. We know he is both God and man at the same time. Where does the one leave off and the other start?

Numerous Old Testament stories show God intermingled with human affairs in such a way that without this mixture, we would have no stories.

If a Christian finds the biblical worldview inadequate for his or her needs, then the problem is in the Christian, not in the biblical injunctions on how to obtain peace. Something is wrong in his or her relationship with God the Father.

Why would I want to indulge in an exercise with dubious origins when a good trot and a nap will do?

Personally, I like to examine the origins of ideas and practices. If I see one coming out of a dark pit, I feel no need to descend into the pit to get the details.

A suggestion for Christians who practice yoga:

Let me put it delicately so there will be no confusion. The reason why a Christian may feel the need of yoga or TM for relaxation and peace, could be unconfessed sin. If he or she wants to practice a yoga position, let me suggest a good posture that beats anything yoga has to offer:

One: Place the knees firmly on the floor.

Two: Fold the hands on the lap.

Three: Bend the head down toward the knees.

Four: Repeat this mantra several times, *Oh, God, please show me where I have blown it.*

It will not be long before a spiritual experience occurs, though he or she might not like it. The Holy Spirit may point out something in their conscience they were suppressing because they did not want to face it.

I hope this helps,
Roger