

IS IT OK FOR A CHRISTIAN TO PRACTICE YOGA?

Dear CHI,

I'm a bible believing Christian who also enjoys weekly yoga sessions at my local gym. I've heard that yoga has a bad reputation in Christian circles – even referred to as an occult practice. Is this right? Isn't it true that greater is He that is within us than He that is in the world and that God is in the business of redeeming what was once given over to Satan? If a yoga leader is not leading mantras or other mind seducing chants then can't we be free to use yoga as a benefit to the body even as Christians? Can you help me navigate through this issue? Should I give up my regular yoga sessions? Ruth*

Dear Ruth,

You raise a great question about yoga – it's one we get a lot. Let me preface my answer by saying that I have absolutely no doubt that yoga is a hindrance and perhaps even a danger to a Christian's growth in faith and in their relationship with the Lord.

Upfront I want to stress that this does not rise to the level of a salvation issue. Many Christians do practice yoga, being unaware of the potential or actual negative effects on their spiritual life, and I don't think they are 'going to hell' for it. Salvation is dependent not on our living in perfect holiness but simply on whether we have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Nonetheless, I'm also convinced that Christians who regularly practice yoga will not have the depth and width and strength of relationship with Jesus nor the fullness of the life of witness that the Lord desires for them. For many Christians, the effect of participating in yoga is one of limiting or stifling their intimacy with Jesus and their life 'in the vine'. For others, the effect progresses from simply limiting the fullness of their Christian faith and walk to literally opening them up to demonic oppression (which of these occurs is very individual and depends on a number of other factors). Personally, I wouldn't want to risk it either way. I say this from experience, since my own testimony is that the Lord saved me from almost 30 years in New Age philosophies and practices, including that of yoga.

Let me explain a little more about the fallacy behind thinking that yoga can be practiced in a way that is spiritually safe for Christians. We here in the western world live under the mistaken belief that it is possible to completely separate the physical and the spiritual realms. We think that we can detach something from its religious origins, taking all the benefit but ignoring anything detrimental. We tend to look at things very pragmatically; often all that seems to matter is whether something is producing the desired result - and yoga can indeed be a good way to stretch and relax one's body. Many yoga advocates argue that we can do simply the physical poses of yoga and as long as we are not doing the chanting, then it will be devoid of spiritual content or effect. Some well-intentioned Christians even take the extra step of re-naming the poses and replacing the chants with biblical phrases or affirmations. Yet the truth



remains that these yoga poses and breathing patterns were developed specifically to tie a practitioner's individual spirit to the 'all-pervading spirit' of the universe. In fact, the word *yoga* comes from the Sanskrit word 'yog' meaning union or – in Christian terminology – “yoke”. Some would say that the spiritual being/power/energy is just another name for the Holy Spirit, but that is NOT the case. Yoga cannot be completely stripped of its Hindu origins, and the Christian who practices yoga is exposing themselves to powers, entities and influences that the Bible warns us to avoid at all costs.

Whether people are aware of the spiritual aspects of yoga or not makes no difference – the breathing and the poses will still have their original, intended effect of opening up the person to unholy spirits. In fact, most of the poses themselves are poses of worship to the myriad of Hindu deities, many of whom are in animal form. In reality, the yoga practitioner is presenting their body 'as a living sacrifice' (to quote the Apostle Paul) -- not to the God of the Bible, but to the 'little-g' gods of the pagan world.

As I mentioned, we get this question as to whether it is okay for Christians to practice yoga quite frequently. Most questioners are persons like yourself who love the Lord and who desire all that the Lord has for them. It is not my role to convince anyone, but simply to offer information from a Biblical spiritual perspective. Ultimately, you will need to decide for yourself whether to continue in the practice of yoga or not. Fortunately, scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit of truth will lead us into all truth, and that when we ask, the Lord will provide wisdom. “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” (James 1:5). I am confident that anyone who sincerely asks the Lord for HIS guidance on this matter will receive it. For myself and my team, we speak not from any attitude of condemnation (for there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus) - we just don't want you to be hampered by forces that oppose the Kingdom of God, or to miss out on anything good that the Lord desires for you.

There are many good resources available on line to learn much more about this topic, should you desire to do further research. A web site with materials that I have found especially helpful is Whatsthematterwithyoga.wordpress.com.

Blessings in Christ Jesus,

The Rev. Kathleen Christopher
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It is the purpose of the Christian Healing Institute to provide resources, teaching and training to other Christians and faith communities on the power and practice of prayer – whether for healing (physical, emotional, spiritual) or for needs of any kind. To learn more about the Christian Healing Institute, who we are and the tools we offer visit www.christianhealingministries.org.

* fictional name