

YOGA

Contemporary Issues: Years ago an Eastern Mystical phenomenon known as Trancendental Meditation swept through our U.S. culture and affected many who were naively drawn into its not so subtle influence. Today Yoga is everywhere! What follows is a commentary from an Orthodox Christian perspective on the contemporary fascination with Yoga.

From the book now in part available: "The Gurus, The Young Man, and Elder Paisios"

Today the system of Yoga is presented as a panacea for almost all health problems, and many other problems that face humanity. Our doctors tell us to do Yoga for just about any complaint from stress to depression to fatigue, and we hear advertising slogans such as: Do Yoga for health and beauty. Because we have been involved in Yoga for years, and some of us have even become teachers of Yoga, we would like to share our experience and some problems on the subject.

Upon beginning the practice of Yoga, one truly experiences feelings of well-being and invigoration. However, one is compelled to attribute this improvement to the "hidden powers" or the "secret wisdom" that is supposedly concealed within the Yoga exercises themselves. One could easily attribute the feeling of well-being to the movement, the physical activity that is, that awakens one from today's sedentary lifestyle. For this reason, one experiences the same benefits upon beginning any sort of exercise routine such as jogging, swimming, etc. Much more so when one quits certain harmful habits that students of Yoga are instructed to abstain from such as smoking, overeating, alcohol consumption, and irregular sleep (especially due to all night partying).

Every "metaphysical" explanation of these health benefits is superfluous...

However, the feelings of well being are only experienced by beginners. The more one advances in the practice of Yoga, the more problems develop. These include pain in the back, knees, and other joints. The positions (asana) of Yoga are unnatural for the body. They are inspired by and mimic animal stances, as their names reveal: Salabasana= grasshopper position, Buddzavgasana=Cobra position, Utthan Pristsana=Lizard position, Kukontasana=Rooster position, and other such curious names.

Some of these positions are more difficult than others to execute because one must exercise for some time before being able to properly "sit" in these Yoga postures. Little by little, the joints become more flexible and with persistent force are pushed beyond the limits of their natural movements until they are able to twist to assume these unnatural poses. As a result, many people are more or less seriously injured, causing permanent damage to their knees and spine as well as injured tendons and ruptured ligaments and meniscus (cartilage).

The gurus acknowledge these physical disadvantages, but they say that anyone who complains about the pains incurred through the advanced practice of Yoga is "unworthy" of Yoga.

Some teachers of Yoga use deception to attract followers, lauding the health benefits of Yoga and advertising with typical slogans such as the above mentioned "Yoga for Health and Beauty". A certain Indian Guru, in answer to his "competitors" for Yoga students, responded with these very enlightening words: "Whoever does Yoga for health and beauty would be better off swimming. They have no reason to do Yoga. Yoga is for those who are interested in making spiritual progress." The question is: what sort of spiritual progress is the student of Yoga making?!

The purpose of Yoga exercise has absolutely nothing to do with development of the muscular system or acquisition of flexibility, as is clear from the adverse physical side effects of continued practice. The goal of Yoga is alteration of the biochemical balance of the organism!

When a person assumes the Yoga positions he exerts force on the internal organs including the heart, intestines, liver, and lungs: but the poses are specifically selected for the pressure they exercise on the

endocrine glands. In most cases, this pressure stimulates the gland causing hyperactive function and discharge of excessive quantities of hormones in the body. Sometimes, exactly the opposite effect is "achieved", and the glands become under-active. Every group of Yoga positions is intended to influence different glands, for example: one type of posture activates the thyroid gland causing greatly increased production of the hormone thyroxin that spills into the bloodstream and completely alters the basic metabolism of the body.

The person becomes hyperactive, something that is explained by the Yogis as "drawing energy from superior universal centers" through the Yoga techniques. The Yogi take care to "pass" this interpretation through their literature in advance, before the student experiences anything, so that they will "recognize" it when it happens.

One advanced Yogi compared the effects of Yoga to taking L.S.D. continually. (L.S.D. is a very strong drug known to cause severe visual and aural hallucinations, and schizophrenia with more than 30 uses. Some users incur serious psychological disorders after one single "trial" dose of L.S.D.) In other words, one of the main and most desirable immediate results of Yoga is altered sensory perception, and this leads to the "craziness" that the Hindus consider "sacred"!

Are these hormonal increases, these biochemical changes harmless or even beneficial? Could someone who is lethargic with a slow metabolism be benefited by Yoga exercises? On the contrary, it is an extremely dangerous practice, both physically and psychologically. The slightest hormonal disturbance is sufficient to cause an abundance of serious illnesses including: infertility, elevated blood pressure, goiter, diabetes, etc. One can also develop acute forms of rapidly progressing cancer and serious psychological disorders. These are side effects only of the physical "benefits" of Yoga.

After several instances of serious illnesses and especially suicides among students of Yoga, gurus were forced to begin informing people of the possible dangers associated with Yoga. Of course, the blame was always laid on the victim, the student of Yoga, and never on the teacher or the techniques themselves.

One intensive student of Maharisi Yoga with many years of experience states that "the relaxation achieved through meditation is an

Indian-style passivity that paralyzes every ability for resistance or struggle, but is far removed from true peace and spiritual progress. . . a person uses Yoga techniques to hypnotize himself and slowly loses every ability to exercise his free will and initiative. It is a brain-washing that one undergoes in stages until his personality is lost."

The guru Paramahansa Niradzananta confirms this in articles that he writes about his ashram (community/monastery) explaining that a disciple is allowed to live in the ashram with the guru and preserve his "ego" (his "self" or personality) but "the whole time the guru carefully prepares the scene for [the Yogi's] eventual breakdown. With the slightest movement of the guru, the disciple's "ego" disappears in a flash."

For the exercises of Yoga to progress more effectively, and to have stronger results, the Yogis tell the students to chant some special sounds, saying a mantra. These mantra are call upon the names of the Hindu gods, they are prayers to the idols. The most common of these is the "sacred" syllable "Om", other examples are the hare om, hare Krishna, and om nama Sivaya. The purpose of chanting mantra, according to Yoga instructors, is to "clear the spiritual atmosphere". These mantras are prayers to the idols, and chanting them causes the withdrawal of divine Grace since it is a recognition of the gods and Hinduism and a denial of Christ. It is the transgression of the first commandment: "I am the Lord your God . . .". This leaves the "atmosphere" open to the devil who finds us unprotected since in denying Christ, one gives authority to the devil over him. So the devil sets the stage with some supernatural phenomena to enchant the student of Yoga and draw him deeper into deception, to the point where he begins to believe in the gods because he sees "miracles", thus he is slowly and unconsciously drawn farther from Christ and into idolatry, perhaps even reaching undisguised worship of Satan.

Since Yoga has many European and American followers, who do not believe in the Hindu gods, to reassure and deceive them, the Yogis created the explanation that the mantra's power does not come from calling on the idols, but from the frequency or the sound/echo of the mantra. They also say that there are certain "Christian mantra" such as the "Jesus Prayer" that are also beneficial (only due to the frequency, of course). However, in trials, certain Yogis have found it very disturbing to have a student praying or singing Orthodox hymns during their exercises.

However, this does not mean that it is okay to participate in Yoga as long as one prays while doing the exercises. This is the worst type of deception, that which mingles Christianity with the occult to deceive even the elect. Yoga and Hinduism are inseparable, off spring of one another, and nonexistent without the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic idols.

The Hindus try to present things differently, in a more deceiving manner that states that Christianity and Hinduism are approximately the same. They basically consider Christianity an inferior form of Hinduism. Christians are on a path to God, they say, only less spiritual. Hindus claim that Christ was a great Yogi, a disciple of Siva, (the "god" who discovered Yoga), or one of the nine incarnations of the Babaji, the great "god" Vishnu (along with Krishna). They claim that Christ went to India after the Resurrection and founded an ashram in the Himalayas which He named "New Jerusalem", and that He died there.

On the other hand, Orthodox Christianity is straight forward that we have no spiritual relation with Hinduism. We are with God, they with the devil. Therefore the Hindus complain of some narrow-minded fanatics who won't accept their spiritual relation or superiority. But there is no small-minded priest or monk in question here. God Himself gives the commandment. Where is the similarit between the One God of the Christians and the pantheon of the Hindus This comparison is on the level of logic with the following: people have two legs, chickens have two legs, people and chickens are basically the same, only that people are superior to chickens.

One can find innumerable parallels between Christianity and Hinduism but these are not similarities. This is how the devil works. He makes things look the same on the outside, so as to deceive and draw people into worship of him!

What is incomprehensible to most Westerners and therefore deceptive, is that the Hindus actually believe in these gods. Idolatry is active in India just as it was 2000 years ago in Rome and Greece. These people worship their thousands of gods with sacrifices (including human sacrifices) orgies, etc. Among their gods they also count the Yogis and Gurus, and these people accept their worship as did the Roman Emperors.

According to the Bangavat Gita (the "Gospel" of the Hindus) Yoga is not a human innovation or discovery, but "divine revelation" that the

"lord of Yoga" offers to humanity. The text reveals that Yoga is the form of worship that the "god" Krishna desires to be worshipped with by his followers. Krishna speaks with authority in the text and says that not only the practice of Yoga but even the contemplation of the theories thereof are considered worship toward him. Also, Krishna teaches that Yoga is a sacrifice to him, and that the sacred syllable "Om" is himself. The word "Yoga" means "union with god", this is the goal of Yoga. Which "god" though? According to the sacred Gita, Yoga unites one with Krishna.

Yoga will not "make you a better Christian" as certain instructors try to claim, but will slowly and deceptively draw you into Hinduism.

Christianity is by no means against various forms of exercise and relaxation, but one must chose activities that do not dapple with the occult, even if the medical world attempts to scientifically explain the benefits, or remove it from its religious associations. Praying has been proven relaxing regardless of what god one believes in, and we Christians especially ought to take advantage of this since it is also beneficial to our soul. Also, listening to music and reading are good relaxing activities, assuming that we select our material carefully as not to pollute us, but to benefit us.

Just as Yoga cannot be separated from Hindu theology, so there is a prayer of the body provided by the Orthodox Church that embraces the whole Christian Theology, which also happens to be an excellent form of exercise, though it is preferable not to think of it as such. Prostrations are accompanied the most perfect and complete prayer: Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me. With the direction of a spiritual father, the Orthodox Christian can greatly benefit the health of both body and soul simply by embracing the spiritual life.

The end and Glory to God!