

One Christian's Response to Yoga

By Pamela Fraser

Should Christians feel guilty if they practice yoga? Is Christian Yoga an oxymoron? To answer simply in a word, no. The teachings of Jesus Christ and a yoga practice are not in opposition. In fact, Jesus embodied many of the beautiful philosophies of yoga.

Yoga is not a religion. It is a tool, and as such, its function depends entirely upon the user. Any tool may be misused, even exploited--or at least may not serve the original intention of those who developed the instrument.

Examples of misuse and abuse abound. Words can be used to warm the heart or cut like a knife; a knife can carve meat or slay innocent victims. Even God's words from the Scriptures were misused and desecrated (as recorded in the Book of Luke, Chapter 4, Verses 9-12) when Satan quoted the prophet's words from Hosea 12:4, in the effort to tempt Jesus into jumping from the temple roof.

One of the most decadent perversions of misuse exists in the world of cyberspace. Bill Gates, Steve Job and the geniuses who collaborated to develop computers could not have guessed all the creative ways that devious minds have concocted in the public misapplication of computers. The internet can serve to pass on important information, prayers and even requests for prayers. Or online users can maliciously spread viruses, terrorists' plans, pornography and sex, or even requests for sex. An airplane can transport people to family reunions and vacations, or it can be used as a missile to target tall buildings in New York City.

Should we reject all devices that can be used for evil, ergo "throw the baby out with the bath water?" Or should we make every effort to utilize the wisdom that has been passed down by the grace of God through the ages to mankind all around the globe?

The history of yoga indicates that it has been practiced for a variety of reasons, as an art, a science and a philosophy of life, and in its earliest occasions with religious affiliations. In recent times however, the new mainstream "hatha" or westernized yoga has been serving as a holistic balancing exercise for a fit and healthy body, an aware and focused mind, while providing an environment that encourages a maturing spirit. Yoga practitioners are enriching all aspects of their lives; they are not worshipping a yoga god.

There is no yoga god. In ancient times, historians say as many as five thousand years ago, yoga was developed by medicine men and gurus as a comprehensive approach to good health and living. This philosophy, called "ayurveda," developed out of necessity because there were no surgeons performing unnecessary surgeries or prescribing harmful drugs. Today yoga is a discipline that is practiced around the world in many different styles by individuals representing all of the world religions---yes, even Christianity.

In fact, a soon-to-be-published book entitled *New Every Morning*, written by Christian yoga teacher Pamela Fraser, contains many more details on the history of this apparently controversial subject as it relates to religion. Writing from a Christian perspective, the author shares her personal discoveries of how the daily practice of yoga can serve as a set of spiritual training wheels to balance the demands of the outer physical life with an inner, very personal relationship with the Creator.

Although the author confesses she's honestly not a "morning person," she has become hooked on the euphoric feeling of awakening before dawn in the holy hush of morning, falling on her knees in what is called "child's pose," beginning each day in a stillness that enhances a very significant two-way relationship. She precedes her yoga practice by talking to God in prayer. Then with an aware and focused mind, opens the channels to receive communication by meditating on Scripture, and listening closely to her body and breath as she moves through a dozen or more yoga postures, depending on the schedule for that day.

Christians can be assured that it's okay to practice yoga. Many yoga poses or "asanas" actually evoke images and messages from The Holy Bible. For example, "Camel Pose" or "ustrasana" is reminiscent of Jesus telling his disciples (as recorded in Verse 24 of the 19th Chapter of Matthew) that physical riches make it very difficult, but not impossible, for us to enter into the next life, "the kingdom of God." While in the balancing posture called "vrksasana" or tree pose, it's easy to relate to the importance of being like a tree, firmly planted and grounded in God's Holy Word.

In an ideal world, every person of every religion should be free to adapt an individual belief system in conjunction with the practice of yoga. The user ultimately controls the use of the instrument. Yoga can be an extremely valuable tool or device to enhance one's journey through life, and only becomes pagan when performed by a pagan practitioner.