

YOGA - THE BARE FACTS: When it comes to Yoga, don't make a Boo-Boo.

1 - INTRODUCTION

Hi _____,

Thank you for prompting me to write these few short emails that aim to get to the heart of yoga and to explain it in a simple way. I urge you to approach this material with a critical, but open, mind.

Almost all Western yoga teachers insist that their classes have no spiritual connotations. But actual yogis from the region where yoga was conceived and developed say otherwise, and acknowledge that yoga's purpose is **entirely** spiritual.

For example, Swami Nirmalananda Giri has said: "'Yoga' ... means 'to join'. ... What do we join through yoga? Two eternal beings: God, the Infinite being, and the individual spirit that is finite being."

And Sri Swami Sivananda's book 'Yoga for the West' tells us that "Yoga is ... conscious communion with God."

And Professor Subhas Tiwari, in his book 'Yoga Renamed is Still Hindu', informs us: "yoga originated from the Vedic or Hindu culture. Its techniques were not ADOPTED BY Hinduism, but ORIGINATED FROM it. ... The effort to separate yoga from Hinduism must be challenged because it runs counter to the fundamental principles upon which yoga itself is premised, ... Yoga ... was intended by the Vedic seers as an instrument which can lead one to apprehend the Absolute, Ultimate reality, called the Brahmin reality, or God" [Caps mine.]

The above quotes have two interesting ramifications:

(i) Since the great bulk of Western yoga teachers deny that yoga is at least partly a religious activity, they are either wrong (and are therefore messing with something they are clearly ill-informed about) or they are being outright dishonest. Either way, this is not a great advert for Western yoga.

(ii) The breathing exercises used in yoga; the yoga postures; the yogic Mantras; and yogic Meditation are **not** designed for the purpose that the Western pupil imagines. They are not, for example, designed to improve fitness, firmness or flexibility. It is unquestionably true that yogic practices do, for instance, improve flexibility, but that was never their intention. Given this, there are likely to be better ways to achieve these ends.

No-one can deny that yoga can have beneficial effects on the body and mind. Many of these benefits have been scientifically proven. But that fact alone doesn't **automatically** mean yoga is a wise activity - because, in the long term at least, yoga could potentially also have harmful effects (psychologically or spiritually, say) that outweigh the benefits. Let me offer an analogy. The drug Thalidomide was found to be excellent at combating morning sickness in pregnant women. It had a positive effect. But only much

later did it become apparent that the drug had far more serious *negative* consequences. It caused terrible deformities in unborn babies, and killed many of them.

And, since yoga affects the mind, it could theoretically be doing damage without its adherents being able to discern that fact - just as people with certain addictions can be oblivious to the harm they are causing themselves and others (even when folks try to alert them to what is really going on), because the very activity they are involved in obscures their ability to see the truth about that activity.

In other words, we need to dig a little deeper and understand what is at the core of yoga before we can be completely sure it is good. This is precisely what this set of emails is designed to do. This material doesn't seek to offer exhaustive lists of the positives and negatives. Instead it will peel back the layers to reveal yoga's true nature. The sections where I make mention of positive or negative aspects of yoga are always there to help us get to the nub of the central issue. In the meantime, there are alternatives to yoga for various needs. A friend of mine who is aware of the types of physical benefit gained from yoga sent me the following note:

[In place of yoga], I practice aerobic, ballet, and stretching exercises, and would recommend them all (either classes or DVDs) as excellent all-round ways of keeping fit and flexible. Three of my favourite DVDs (all available from Amazon) are:

****Aerobics****: Jane Fonda, 'Prime Time Fit and Strong' – "tone and shape every major muscle group and strengthen your core";

****Ballet****: Deborah Sims, 'Ballet Class for Adult Beginners' – "Focuses all muscle groups";

****Stretching****: Sharron Davies, 'The Stretch' – "to increase mobility and suppleness".

Of course, swimming is another wonderful way to keep fit. It provides suppleness, strength and stamina - plus the mental benefits that naturally accrue from having a healthier body.

I plan to write to you again, because it turns out that there are further important aspects of yoga that Western teachers hide or are oblivious to, and I feel it imperative to let you know of them. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to shout if you have any questions or would like me to send more evidence in support of what I've written here.

All the very best,

John

=====

2 - BASIC YOGA THEORY

Dear _____,

Here is the second part of my analysis of yoga for you.

As I pointed out last time, yoga has spiritual connotations. This truth has "never been doubted in the East":

"Yoga was developed to escape this 'unreal' world of time and sense and to reach moksha, the Hindu heaven ... The physical aspects of yoga ... were, in fact, originally developed and practiced for *spiritual* goals" [Emphasis mine].

To bolster this assertion, I ought to provide some specifics. Let's take the postures in yoga. These are known as "Asanas". In his book 'Hatha Yoga', Swami Sivenanda Radha states plainly, "Asanas are a *devotional* practice" [Emphasis mine].

"Many asanas are based on postures that honor Hindu *deities* ... Asanas were designed to aid in ... union with the *divine*" [Emphases mine].

Now let's consider yogic breath control / breathing exercises. These are known as "Pranayama".

"Pranayama refers to the knowledge and control of prana, or *mystical* energy, not merely to the control of one's physical breath. Prana is believed to be universal *divine* energy residing behind the material world." [Emphases mine].

(Likewise, yogic meditation has a spiritual facet; as does the yogic greeting "Namaste"; as do yogic mantras. If you'd like proof of any of this, just let me know.)

There are various types of yoga. The use of yogic postures and/or yogic breath-control is termed "Hatha" yoga, and this is the form of yoga normally taught in the West. Unfortunately, if a Western yoga teacher says yoga has no spiritual dimension, they are surely not qualified to teach it.

From everything we have seen so far, it seems evident that people who practice yoga are dabbling in the spiritual realm whether they want to or not. Yogis from the East have acknowledged that doing so without proper instruction or proper understanding is dangerous. Indeed, the ancient texts warn of potential *disaster* from experiencing the spiritual realm in the manner reached through yoga:

"For those who practice Hatha for purely physical ends, outside of a total context of spiritual discipline, most of the classic commentaries issue dire warnings. The Ananda Marga Yoga Society's manual for teachers sums them up well: 'Indeed from the practice of Hatha Yoga, ... mental and spiritual *degeneration* may ultimately occur'" [Emphasis mine].

But even with mature instruction from a fully-qualified guru, and even if the student practices yogic disciplines as they were designed to be practiced, Hatha yoga carries a big risk - according to its own devotees. Consider the following two quotes:

"Yoga theory ... teaches that in their outer nature, everything is maya, or illusion. ... [Yoga teaches that man's] 'outer nature', of body and personality, are ultimately a delusion ... Thus, another purpose of yoga must be to slowly *dismantle* the outer personality - man's illusory part - so the supposed impersonal divinity can progressively [emerge]. ... Yoga is, after all, a religious practice seeking to produce 'union' with an impersonal ultimate reality, such as Brahman or Nirvana. If ultimate reality is

impersonal, of what value is one's own personality? For a person to achieve true 'union' with Brahman, his 'false' self must be destroyed ... That is the specific goal of yoga" [Emphasis mine].

"Yoga ... aims to annihilate ... anything that can define personhood."

The process of losing one's personhood through yoga may be a very gradual one, but it is hard to argue with those people who say that every small step down this road weakens one's grip on reality and will increase the likelihood of mental ill-health. This danger is compounded by another aspect of yogic teaching:

"[T]he Hindu concept [is] that god [is] everything, that the Creator and the Creation [are] one and the same. If there [is] only One Reality, then Brahman [is] evil as well as good, death as well as life, hatred as well as love. That [makes] everything meaningless, life an absurdity. It [is] not easy to maintain one's sanity and the view that good and evil, love and hate, life and death [are] One Reality".

If, as yogic theory claims, the Universe is God, then since our world contains lies as well as truth, both are part of God. When taken to its logical conclusion, this teaching does not appear to be conducive to one's mental welfare. And even yogic gurus admit that hatha yoga can lead to serious mental problems:

"When referring to his encounters with individuals who went mad, [Gopi Krishna] says that it is widely known in India that hatha yoga practices can lead to insanity: 'The power, when aroused in a body not attuned to it ... can lead to awful mental states, to almost every form of mental disorder, ... to the most horrible forms of insanity, to neurotic and paranoid states, to megalomania'".

"[A] young boy of perhaps sixteen ... joined our monastery to practice hatha yoga. When I returned to India after an absence of thirteen years, ... I happened to notice this young person in the distance. He was acting very strangely. ... The swami said that he had lost his mind. ... I was amazed to see that he still looked the same as when I knew him thirteen years ago! So it was true: certain exercises did keep one youthful. Yet how COSTLY! ... [H]e became so unmanageable that he had to be confined" [Swami Prabhavanada, 'Yoga - True and False'; Caps mine].

As previously, I want to close by offering an alternative to yoga - in case you are thinking of taking it up for the purposes of better flexibility. "For stretching exercises, try The Stretch Deck, a set of 50 heavy-duty cards showing stretches for all the major muscle groups. Each card shows an illustration of a single stretch with step-by-step instructions on the reverse side. The cards also list the benefits of each stretch and offer a helpful tip."

There are even more fascinating dimensions to yoga, and I plan to cover some of these in my next email.

Hoping this material is of help.

All the best,

John

=====

3 - YOGA AND THE BRAIN

Dear _____,

Here's the third offering in my discussion of yoga.

Webster's New World Dictionary states that yoga is, "A Mystic and ascetic Hindu discipline for achieving union with the supreme spirit through meditation, prescribed postures, controlled breathing...".

What's more, while "[v]arious schools or styles of Yoga have [been created] ... It must always be remembered that ALL these are merely different methods of reaching for the SAME ultimate goal" [Caps mine] - and that goal is spiritual.

As I noted last time, the yogic postures and breath control are both meant to serve this goal. Here are some more quotes to confirm this: "Asanas (i.e. yogic postures) were designed to aid in ... union with the divine", and "[Pranayama is] the control and directing of the breath and the alleged divine energy within the human body to promote ... spiritual consciousness..."

You'll recall that, together, the asanas and pranayama comprise Hatha Yoga, and "Hatha Yoga practices seek to ... allow for apprehension of ... Brahmin".

But again I ought to give more details.

According to yogis, the purpose of Hatha Yoga is to "suppress physical obstacles on the Spiritual [path]." More specifically, the postures and breath control are designed to help bring about 'altered states of consciousness'.

"In order that liberation may be attained it is necessary that [normal] consciousness be extinguished". How is this achieved? There needs to be a significant degree of disconnect between the brain and the entity that operates the brain (i.e. one's mind or "consciousness" or soul). Hatha Yoga accomplishes this in three stages:

STAGE 1: The aim of the yogic postures is "to immobilize the body, to bring it under control and refuse movement, with the *only* goal of helping concentration. Therefore, the purpose of performing asanas is not (as often believed in the West) to confer harmony and health to the body, provide relaxation, etc., but to be a physical support for *concentration*." [Emphases mine]

Of course, concentration is unquestionably valuable whenever we humans need to focus our attention on something significant in order to respond appropriately to the thing in question, but yogic concentration is aimed at focusing on something *insignificant* so that our brain gets bored and starts to disconnect from its owner, the mind or soul.

"[Yogic] Concentration is ... not a simple exercise of attention control, but a way of slowing down mental activity".

How exactly do asanas help with yogic concentration? What they do is break the normal sensory input from our surroundings and, "as a result, the senses come to a point where they do not process a continuous flux of information from the outer world that varies much from one moment to the next. Instead they stay immobilized on the same stimulus." The brain therefore gets bored.

STAGE 2: Yoga teachers tell us that breath control is "an important instrument in attaining a perfect state of concentration."

"Just as the asanas are not aimed at enhancing physical fitness, but the immobilization of the body, neither is the purpose of breath control (pranayama) to enhance the respiratory flow, but rather to reduce it". Reducing one's breathing reduces the amount of oxygen reaching the brain and is another way to help disconnect the brain from one's "consciousness" or soul.

The combination of yogic postures and breath control is enough, at least in some people, to cause an 'altered state of consciousness'. But in case anyone needs it, most yoga instructors add an additional step:

STAGE 3: As I've said, it is necessary to make the brain bored in order to help separate it from its owner. Eastern meditation is another technique for achieving this. In Eastern meditation, "one might practice concentrating on a sound (e.g. one's own chanting of a mantra, such as the name of a Hindu god or the sacred syllable om), ... on an image (e.g., the tip of one's nose...), or on one's own breathing. The purpose, however, is to so focus on an object that the object itself *disappears* and a state of pure (i.e., thoughtless) consciousness is attained." [Emphasis mine.]

The question becomes, what happens then? The human soul or 'consciousness' is not a physical thing. It is spiritual. By using yoga techniques, you bypass the inbuilt safeguards that exist to stop your brain becoming disconnected from your soul to any significant extent. Hence you relinquish a degree of control over your brain and you thereby allow another spiritual entity to 'take up the slack'.

Sure enough, gurus talk about "absorption" of, or merging with, a spiritual entity:

"Perhaps the dominant characteristic in ... yoga practice is an experience of ... *possession*. Gopi Krishna describes the following experiences of most yogic, meditative, and mystical practices. 'During the ecstasy or trance, consciousness is transformed and the yogi ... finds himself in direct rapport with an overwhelming Presence. This ... living, conscious Presence spreads everywhere and occupies the whole mind and thought of the devotee....'" [Emphasis mine.]

Several dangers arise from this. Perhaps the most obvious one is that, by handing over control of your faculties, you can suffer uncontrollable mood swings and uncontrollable bodily actions. "Your mind gets influenced spiritually as if some spirit has taken possession of your body and under that influence different postures of yoga are involuntarily performed". "It seemed that I was being controlled by some power which made me do all these things. I no longer had a will of my own."

Furthermore, through yoga, "the sense of self-identity is lost". Yoga authorities Feuerstein and Miller identify "the Yogic path as a progressive dismantling of human personality ending in a complete

abolition." Therefore we should not be surprised that "yoga practice can break down the mind The true goal of yoga is to destroy the person (who [supposedly] is only a false self, an illusion) so that the impersonal Brahman (the alleged real self) may be experienced." If one's personality is abolished and one's mind is "broken down", it is no wonder that insanity can follow, as we saw last time.

A related danger is that of suicide. Yogis actually try to convince us that the "will to live" is actually a "product of *ignorance*" [Emphasis mine].

In closing, here is a quote that may be worthy of our attention: "Consider the following letter, typical of many we have received over the years: 'My daughter, age 43, for the past 10 years has been involved with Hatha Yoga and at the present time she is experiencing ... violent shaking, hallucinations, murderous impulses ... uncontrollable rage ... trying to commit suicide... She says she would like to give up Yoga and be released from the spirit of her last teacher that is currently inflicting excruciating pain upon her. We've taken her to see several doctors, but they have been of no help. Her mother and I are at our wits end ... Please help if you can.' Of course, nothing like this horror was even hinted at by those who taught her yoga as a supposedly healthful daily practice, which was promoted as purely physical. ... [S]he is typical of many, many others" [Dave Hunt, 'Yoga and the Body of Christ', (2006), pp.70-71].

I have a feeling you will find the next email quite surprising.

All the best as always,

John

=====

4 - WARNINGS FROM YOGIS

Dear _____,

Below is the next instalment of my analysis.

Eastern gurus tell us that "the ultimate aim of Yoga is to reach 'Kaivalya' This is the experience of one's innermost being or 'soul' (the Purusa). ... Yoga is therefore a *spiritual* quest" [Emphasis mine].

As noted in my very first email, if a yoga teacher denies yoga's inherently spiritual nature, he/she is lying - or is horribly uninformed. If the latter, then the quality of yoga promoted by that teacher carries serious risks. "Many yoga authorities openly confess the dangers of yoga practice." For the sake of argument, I will put all of the following dangers down to wrong practice. However, some researchers have said, "no one has ever objectively identified the specific mechanics of 'correct' or 'incorrect' yoga; 'incorrect' yoga practice in one tradition is often 'correct' practice in another."

ASANAS:

"[T]he press has noted a 'SURGE of muscle and ligament sprains, disk injuries, and cartilage tears,' 'mild to moderate sprains of the knees, shoulder, neck, or back,' and 'soft-tissue and joint injuries' associated with yoga, with some of the injuries sustained being quite serious." [Caps mine]

A New York Times article looked at some of yoga's negative effects: "'The extreme range of motion yoga develops does not necessarily have an advantage, and it may be counterproductive,' said Dr. Shirley Sahrmann, a professor of physical therapy at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. Like dancers, practitioners of yoga cultivate overly flexible spines, which often cause problems in resting posture. 'In my business,' Dr. Sahrmann said, 'I have more problems with people who have excessive mobility than limited mobility.'"

PRANAYAMA:

(Please note that all the quotes in the rest of this email are from people who promote yoga.)

"Now we come to breathing exercises. Let me caution you they can be very dangerous. Unless properly done, there is a good chance of injuring the brain. And those who practice such breathing without proper supervision can suffer a disease which no known science or doctor can cure. It is impossible even for a medical person to diagnose such an illness" [Swami Prabhavanada].

"I know of one individual who complained to me of constantly experiencing headaches; and though he had gone to a number of doctors, they were unable to do anything for him. I asked him, 'Have you been practising breathing exercises?'. 'Yes', he said, 'I have'. At once I knew the source of his problem - breathing exercises" [Swami Prabhavanada].

United Nations spiritual adviser and spiritist Sri Chinmoy, author of 'Yoga and the Spiritual Life', observes: "To practice pranayama [yogic breath control] without real guidance is very dangerous. I know of three persons who have *died* from it." [Emphasis mine.]

YOGIC MEDITATION:

Hindu master Sri Krishna Prem cautions in 'The Yoga of the Bhagavat Gita': "As stated before, *nothing* but dangerous, mediumistic psychisms or neurotic dissociations of personality can result from the practice of [yoga] meditation without the qualifications mentioned at the end of the last chapter." [Emphasis mine]. He further warns, "To practice it, as many do, out of curiosity... is a mistake which is punished with futility, neurosis, or worse ['even insanity itself']."

GENERAL:

Shree Purohit Swami's commentary on Patanjali's famous Yoga Sutras warns:

"In India and Europe, I came across some three hundred people who suffered permanently from wrong practices. The doctors, upon examination, found there was nothing organically wrong and consequently could not prescribe [treatment]."

In 'The Seven Schools of Yoga', Ernest Wood warns of "the imminent risk of most serious bodily disorder, disease, and even madness."

CONCLUSION

It seems to me that, whatever the benefits of yoga, they may be outweighed by the risks that I have touched on so far.

Please bear in mind too that, in this email, I have focused purely on the dangers of *wrong* yoga practice. In my next email, I'll point out some extremely troubling effects from *'correct'* yoga practice.

Best regards,

John

=====

5 - WESTERN YOGA AND KUNDALINI

Dear _____,

Here is the fifth in my series of analyses for you.

I want to start by, once again, reinforcing the point that yoga is spiritual. Yogis openly state, for example, that "The 'Soul' [sic] purpose of the asanas (yoga poses) is to ... enter the spiritual realms."

"The physical aspects of yoga ... which attract many Westerners, were, in fact, originally developed and practiced for spiritual goals". In this email, I've decided to concentrate on what those 'spiritual goals' are.

"Hatha yoga is the yoga of the will which involves cultivating ones' energy to arouse KUNDALINI primarily by means of asana and pranayama" [Caps mine].

"The purpose of Hatha Yoga is to locate and activate the chakras (centers of energy), thereby raising the KUNDALINI (dominant spiritual power)." [Caps mine.]

The term 'Kundalini' comes from the yogic tradition. But what is Kundalini?...

"In Hindu mythology and occult anatomy, the goddess Kundalini is thought of as a female serpent lying dormant at the base of the spine. ... She [supposedly] represents the female half of the divine polarity in man. While lying at the base of the spine, she is separated from Shiva, her divine 'lover' and masculine counterpart, who resides in the brain. When aroused by yoga practices, she uncoils, [and] travels up the spine toward her lover...".

Unfortunately, 'Kundalini arousal' can be very problematic:

"When aroused, [Kundalini] can [cause] ... nausea, diarrhea or constipation, rigidity or limpness, and animal-like movements and sounds". Kundalini can also lead to "uncontrollable sexual urges".

Furthermore, "Gopi Krishna, an advocate of raising the kundalini, nonetheless vividly described how doing so unleashed for him seven years of *severe* psychological and spiritual disorders" [Elliot Miller, 'The Yoga Boom: Part 1: Yoga In Its Original Eastern Context', Christian Research Journal, Vol 31, Number 2 (2008); Emphasis mine].

In 'The Primal Power in Man or the Kundalini Shakti', Swami Narayanananda gives some more details: "[Kundalini can] make the mind fickle, bring insomnia, brain disorder, insanity and incurable diseases. ... [I]f a person does not know how ... to bring down the partly risen kundalini shakti to safer centers, one suffers terribly and it may ruin the whole life of a person or lead one to insanity. This is why we see many become insane, many get brain defects, and many others get some incurable diseases after deep sorrow."

Here is just one such testimony from someone who experienced Kundalini arousal: "I ... often [had] ... thoughts of suicide. ... The physical, mental, and emotional problems ... were so dramatic that I had to quit working. I withdrew from society and had to rely upon my family to care for and support me.... I could no longer cope with my agitated mind. I was besieged with migraine headaches and no longer had any control over my life."

This all raises the question, what sort of a spiritual being would deal in such a way with innocent members of the public who were sincerely seeking him/her/it?

Here's a clue:

"Traditionally [the spirit behind Kundalini arousal] is known as ... Chandi the fierce and bloodthirsty, and Kali the destroyer. She is also Bhajangi the serpent. As Chandi or Kali she has a garland of *skulls* around her neck and drinks human blood." [Emphasis mine.]

Crucially, one does not need to teach on Kundalini in order to arouse it in students: "[Y]oga authorities have said that *all* yoga is ultimately kundalini yoga This is why Hans Rieker concludes, 'Kundalini [is] the mainstay of *all* yoga practices.'" [Emphases mine.] Many yogis "warn against the practice [of Kundalini arousal] for most people and condemn yogis who indiscriminately teach it to the public".

I'm not trying to suggest that attending a few Western yoga classes that are promoted solely as being physically healthful will necessarily produce the types of problems described above (although "Kundalini does not rise only in those who know about it and actively seek to arouse it"). What I am saying is that every yoga class a person attends is a step further down this path and is playing into the hands of the spiritual entity behind yoga.

But what if you just want to practice yoga for the purposes of physical fitness? "Physical yoga, according to its classical definitions, is ... incapable of being separated from Eastern religious metaphysics. The Western practitioner who attempts to do so is operating in ignorance and danger, from the yogi's viewpoint, as well as from the [practitioner's]" [David Fetcho].

I'll end this email with a remark from a descendant of a long line of Brahmin priests and gurus, who is very well placed to know what he is talking about:

"If one desires to achieve physical fitness only, exercises designed for that specific purpose ought rather to be chosen. No part of Yoga can be separated from the philosophy behind it" [Rabi R. Maharaj, 'Death of a Guru', 1977, p.208].

My next email will return to the key topic of Kundalini awakening.

All the best as always,

John

=====

6 - A KUNDALINI TESTIMONY

Dear _____,

This sixth offering is a little different from my previous ones, as it essentially just comprises a single testimony from a woman who experienced Kundalini awakening. Her testimony, however, is considered to be extremely sound by people who are in favour of Kundalini. So much so, in fact, that it takes pride of place on a well-known Kundalini-promoting website.

Her awakening was of an extreme type, known in yogic circles as "dynamic". Most other people will have far milder manifestations. But "Kundalini [is] the mainstay of *all* yoga practices", so the spiritual entity behind her experiences is the selfsame one that all yoga practitioners are serving and submitting themselves to.

----- THE TESTIMONY -----

In 1991, my life imploded. I was overtaken by strange and frightening physical symptoms ... I was in the midst of a Kundalini awakening. ... Long considered the most secret and sacred intent of yoga, Kundalini can also be awakened by meditation, ... psychedelic drugs, ... [and] certain ascetic or esoteric sexual practices...

An enormous weight was bearing down on my chest, making me labor to breathe. I couldn't seem to get enough oxygen; I felt dizzy and light-headed. ... The elephant sitting on my chest didn't budge. My symptoms multiplied and worsened, ...

Worse, my swallowing reflex had somehow short-circuited. When I tried to eat, the muscles that contract in swallowing simply refused to cooperate. I found myself gagging and having to spit out the food. I could only get down liquids, which depended more on the pull of gravity than the cooperation of my throat muscles. ... I was steadily losing pounds. Concerned about my lack of nourishment, my husband Carl crushed vitamins for me with a mortar and pestle; I daily dissolved this potion in a tablespoon of honey which I was able to wash down with lots of water. This and watered-down baby food was my sole fare for weeks.

In addition to the swallowing problem, I felt a constriction like a noose around my neck. Stranger yet, I would go through frequent episodes of repetitive swallowing when I wasn't eating. These would go on for anywhere from a few minutes to an hour, and were most pronounced at night, jarring me from sleep with a horror that I was on the verge of asphyxiation. ...

I returned in short order to the doctor. ... I felt absolutely terrible. A great heaviness descended upon me, as if hundred pound weights were strapped to all my limbs. My head felt huge and filled with crushed glass and I was in a peculiar altered state; my whole body felt drugged or poisoned. ...

With little other recourse, I tried to work psychologically with my symptoms. I told Carl that I had gotten an image of a squadron of "demons" clutching and swaying from my limbs in a Hieronymus Boschian frenzy. ...

I began to tailspin into terrible anxiety and near-suicidal depression, though, oddly, these feelings didn't seem to be in reaction to my physical condition. ... [M]y condition continued to deteriorate. I began to have trouble lifting my legs. ... [M]y ankles turned to rubber and my feet dragged and flopped sideways when I walked. My arms were becoming increasingly useless, and it was hard to move my fingers. I couldn't pick up small items, and I had no gripping strength. Just trying to hold a spoon was a formidable feat. By this time, both Carl and I were getting frantic. ...

I became a bedridden invalid, barely able to use my hands even to dress or feed myself. ... If I had known how much worse things were going to get before they got better, I would have thrown myself off a bridge. I was in and out of the hospital as new symptoms developed. An uncontrollable neck muscle tremor made my head shake back and forth in a palsied rhythm, even when I was lying down. ... I was advised that I might have an incurable and/or fatal condition. ...

With mounting fear, I began to suffer from muscle cramps and an awful systemic burning sensation. The spasms were affecting every part of my body, including my tongue, causing me to slur my words or bite my tongue when talking. The onslaught of symptoms grew outright weird, ranging from a prickling and tingling that roved around beneath my skin, to a horrifying sensation akin to toothpicks stabbing into my eyeballs.

All the medical tests came up negative. I'd been seen, all told, by a dozen doctors, four of them neurologists. ...

One afternoon my brother-in-law dropped by. An acupressurist with innate psychic sensitivity, he became very agitated as soon as he walked in. He told us that the entire house was reverberating with the most unusual energy he'd ever encountered. Stranger yet, he said all this energy seemed to be emanating from me!

Carl and I didn't know what to make of this. We briefly considered I might be possessed by some kind of malevolent entity. ... The pain and fear of fast sinking into the quicksand of physical decline is beyond description. Without a clue to the real cause of my illness, I was simply terrified. ...

For several months, I remained in a state of near-paralysis. The physical pain came to a crescendo in the middle of one night. I awoke in agony. Every muscle in my body, from the soles of my feet to the top of my scalp, was writhing and wrenching as if trying to rip loose from my skeleton. It felt as if each muscle and tendon had taken on a surreal life of its [sic] own: a hideous internal mutiny of thrashing, serpentine creatures. If this wasn't bad enough, I was burning up inside. The very cells in my body felt drenched in battery acid. Carl was awakened to my near-delirious cry: "It feels like burning snakes!" We had no idea how apt a metaphor this would prove to be.

Soon afterward, I began to experience ... full blown Kundalini manifestations. ... I had outright convulsions, ... My world was rife with ... madness. ... Intense, at times unbearable heat made me feel like a human furnace. Oddly, this heat was not at all like a fever and I didn't perspire. ... I was experiencing elaborate, involuntary bodily movements all the while ...

Throughout all this, I was under a barrage of continuously changing physical symptoms, which made me feel -- with not a little gallows humor -- like a hybrid of Linda Blair in "The Exorcist" and Jeff Goldblum in "The Fly". ...

I'd serendipitously flipped open one of my astrology books and opened to a passage ... [about] Kundalini. A few Kundalini manifestations were described, all of which mirrored my symptoms. I began rifling through our home library in search of any additional Kundalini information I could find and I asked Carl to keep an eye peeled for Kundalini titles at bookstores. Shortly thereafter, he came upon Lee Sannella's The Kundalini Experience and Bonnie Greenwell's then newly published Energies of Transformation -- two of the most comprehensive Western texts yet written on the subject.

I devoured both books ... They were describing in detail exactly what I was experiencing! ...

----- TESTIMONY END -----

Whether one talks, as yogis do, of "the Infinite Being", "[the] Overwhelming Presence", "the Absolute, Ultimate Reality", or "God", I urge you to ask yourself whether all of the above experiences are what this 'chief entity ruling over the spirit realm' would do to someone who was on the *right* spiritual path.

Take care,

John

=====

EMAIL 7 - SOME CONCLUSIONS

Hi again _____,

In this seventh email I want to summarise what we've seen previously.

In email number 6, I supplied a long quote from a woman who'd experienced Kundalini awakening. The distinct impression I got from the woman's testimony was that whoever rules over the spiritual realm

was trying to warn her that she was on the *wrong* path. After all, it would surely have to be quite a malevolent 'god' who would do all those things to people who were following the *correct* spiritual path. I want to look, in this next email, more closely at the type of god behind yoga.

I ought to start by reaffirming that all yoga has a spiritual dimension: "In Hinduism, as in many religions, union is desired with nothing less than God or the Absolute, and yoga is the system that Hindus have developed to achieve that end". Each of my earlier emails include quotes corroborating this fact.

But what, specifically, is going on?

In emails #1, #2 and #3, we saw that yoga is designed to unite the practitioner with some sort of spiritual entity. Here are two more quotes to confirm this:

In an ancient book on yoga, "the god of death (Yama) explains to a young disciple how to attain the perfect knowledge of Brahman and thus *MERGE* with [Brahman], through restraining the senses and the practice of concentration." [Caps and emphasis mine.] "Hatha Yoga has to be taught ... in order that the self may *MERGE* with the impersonal Ultimate Reality." [Caps and emphasis mine.]

But who or what are we *merging* with via yoga?

(1) A good God, or an evil one?

In preceding emails, we've repeatedly seen how the spirit behind yoga can produce severe mental illness and insanity in its adherents (emails #2, #3, #4, #5). We've also seen that this spiritual entity, when given a free rein, can cause "murderous impulses and uncontrollable rage" (email #3), suicidal tendencies (#3, #5, #6), uncontrollable sexual urges (#5), chronic headaches (#4, #5, #6), incurable diseases (#4, #5), and indeed death (#4). What we haven't touched on yet is that the spirit behind yoga is apparently so unpleasant that he/she causes terrible things to result from sincere, but imperfect, yoga practice:

"Yoga is not a trifling jest if we consider that *ANY* misunderstanding in the practice of yoga can mean death or insanity" [Hans-Ulrich Rieker, 'The Yoga of Light: Hatha Yoga Pradipika', (1971), pp.9,134; Caps and emphasis mine].

"Ulrich-Rieker lists cancer of the throat, all sorts of ailments, blackouts, ... or insanity from even 'the *SLIGHTEST* mistake'" [Referring to Hans Ulrich-Rieker, 'The Yoga of Light: Hatha Yoga Pradipika' (1971), pp.30,79,96,111-112; Caps and emphasis mine].

As I acknowledged in email #1, people get good things from yoga. But that doesn't mean the god behind yoga is necessarily good, since these good things could just be deliberate lures to entice people into following an evil god.

(2) A God of love, who gives us free will, or a god who wants to take us over?

In emails #3, #5 and #6 we noted that, unlike a loving God who would want us to love Him back out of our own free will, the god behind yoga seems to want to take away the free will of his followers and to

control them – i.e. to physically MAKE them obey his will. For example, email #3 included this testimony: "It seemed that I was being controlled by some power which made me do all these things. I no longer had a will of my own." This is not how a good god would act.

Interestingly, Hindu and Buddhist gurus admit that they are *possessed* by the spirit or 'divine energy' behind yoga...

Consider too that, "Mantras play a major role in yogic meditation. ... [Y]oga mantras are the names of Hindu gods. ... [T]he ancient yoga teachers all declare that the repetition of a mantra is a call to the Hindu god it represents ... to come and *POSSESS* the mediator" [Dave Hunt, 'Yoga and the Body of Christ', (2006), p.158; Caps and emphasis mine].

(3) A God who wants us to use our God-given minds and to think for ourselves, or a god who discourages thinking and wants us to turn off our minds?

In email #3 we saw that the god of yoga wants us to bypass the natural operation of the brain and turn off our minds.

It is true that yogis sometimes promote "study". However, as one of them has stated, "By study is meant chanting the name of the Lord, repeating your mantra. That is the highest study" [Swami Prabhavanada, 'Yoga - True and False']. The very definition of 'yoga' is "A Hindu theistic philosophy teaching the suppression of all activity of body [and] *MIND*" [Merriam Webster Online Dictionary; Caps and emphasis mine].

What sort of god doesn't want you to *think*? And what sort of god discourages genuine study? Might it not be a god who is frightened you'll find out he isn't really God?

Please note that I am certainly not against all "meditation". Not all forms are alike though. For example, "*Christian* meditation ... involves an active rather than a passive mental state. Meditation according to the Bible is filled with content, such as the works, Word, and attributes of God (see e.g., Psalm 1:2; 77:12; 119:15,27,148; 145:5). It never creates a mental void, into which spiritual forces can [enter, unlike yoga]".

(4) A God of truth, who has created a universe which reveals His glory and points us towards Him, or a god of lies who has created a universe of complete illusion?

In email #2 we learned that "Yoga theory ... teaches that in their outer nature, EVERYTHING is maya, or illusion" [Caps mine]. Similarly, "Yoga has always been considered a ... way of rising above the world of illusion and reaching the Ultimate Reality." But surely a *good* God would not surround us with a world in which *everything* is an illusion or lie? (Note how, according to yoga, we must ignore the natural world *and* bypass the natural functioning of our brains. There is something worryingly UNnatural about all this.)

(5) A God who gives his disciples soundness of mind, or a god of confusion?

In email #2 we learned that the teaching which undergirds yoga implies that "good and evil [are] ... One Reality" and that everything is meaningless. There are numerous teachings related to yoga that seem mutually exclusive. For example, it is claimed that yoga unites the practitioner with "the impersonal ... God", yet when people *do* experience the god of yoga, they rightly discern that the god in question is *not* impersonal at all (this fact is borne out by the quotes given in my emails). Yogis also tell us to abandon personal attachments, yet their scriptures say we should have a profound personal attachment to our "Guru":

"There is no doubt that the Guru is father, mother, and even god. He has to be served with all thoughts, words and deeds...' (Shiva Samhita 3,13-14)."

"[Y]oga theory teaches that everything is, in its true inner nature, divine - not only divine but ultimately equal to everything else - everything from God and the devil to the athlete and the AIDS virus". This is confusing (and makes life meaningless) on its own, but it becomes doubly confusing when we consider that vegetarianism is promoted on the basis that animals are essentially divine and therefore shouldn't be killed – yet plants are also claimed to be divine, so why are we allowed to kill them?

Note too that, according to yoga authorities, there is a stage at which "the Yogi is tempted by gods and other spiritual beings to ... become a god (Y.S. 3,52)" - yet yoga simultaneously claims that humans are gods already. We are also taught that "Through ignorance we have forgotten that we possess this divinity within. Hence, it is the purpose of yoga to reveal it to us" [Swarmi Prabhavananda, 'Yoga - True and False'], but I have never heard a yogi explain how this ignorance came about. How can something which starts out as completely divine become ignorant?

No wonder yoga requires us to turn off our minds. Yogis even admit that their teachings are "extra-rational" – i.e. *not* rational. (Yogis often teach that yoga is not about opening ourselves up to some foreign spiritual entity but rather that it is about 'coming home to *self*'. However, who is to say these folks are not confused and wrong about this? Certainly the evidence we have seen so far is profoundly inconsistent with their claim. Perhaps these folks are just plain lying like they do when they claim yoga has no spiritual connotations. Or maybe they have been deceived into believing it by the ungodly spirit behind yoga.)

(6) A God of dignity and decency, or a god of debasement and humiliation?

In email #5 we learned that, "When aroused, [Kundalini] can [cause] ... nausea, diarrhea or constipation, rigidity or limpness, and animal-like movements and sounds". These all sound quite humiliating. Would the true God debase and humiliate his disciples by forcing them, for example, to act like animals?

Likewise, "Kundalini awakening can resemble many disorders, ... [including] epilepsy". This must be embarrassing for those going through it. Yoga practitioners also commonly experience "involuntary laughing or crying", but not for any conscious reason. This too may well embarrass them, as they will appear to be mentally ill. In a kundalini testimony cited in a previous email, the woman in question said, "I was afraid to leave my apartment for fear someone would notice my schizophrenic-like behavior." Is this what a *good* God would engender?

(7) A God who brings peace to a disciple's spirit, or a god who causes you to suspect you've tapped into evil spirits?

In email #6, a woman going through kundalini awakening said that she and her husband considered she "might be possessed by some kind of malevolent entity." Take a look at these other quotes too:

Yogi Amrit Desai warns that unless the experience is interpreted "properly" for the student, "he will become frightened, thinking it to be mental illness"—or "evil spirits."

"Perhaps the dominant characteristic in kundalini arousal and other yoga practice is an experience of energy infusion or possession ... The Taoist Master Chao Pi Ch'en observed that 'as time passes, *demonic* states will occur to the practiser [sic]....'" [Emphasis mine.]

"Significantly, yogic energy manifestations and possession are sometimes initially sensed by the experiencer as the work of an evil spirit."

"In a manner somewhat comparable to LSD, raising the kundalini is considered risky, with temporary madness, lasting mental instability or illness, and occult oppression being possible consequences."

CONCLUSION

I think there is only one sensible conclusion to draw from all of the above. (Again, just because some good things can irrefutably come from yoga practice, it doesn't follow that the god of yoga is a good god. As someone has rightly said, "Even the best mousetrap in the world is useless without a piece of cheese".)

Hoping this helps.

All the best,

John