

YOGA:

Testimony of Deliverance from a Demon of Yoga

Written by Corinna Craft

I practiced and taught power yoga for ten years in secular gym venues: city recreation centers, the YMCA, Bally Total Fitness, and as an adjunct professor at a community college. As a former professional dancer, power yoga was the only system of movement I found complex and challenging and elegant enough to interest me. I considered it the perfect regiment because it included all components of a well-rounded exercise program: strength conditioning, cardio-respiratory fitness, flexibility, balance, and coordination; plus it was graceful and dance-like. I felt consoled that I had found a worthy substitute for dance, just as therapeutic physically and just as cathartic psychologically. Yoga became my primary form of exercise, and I got a lot of relief from it.

I knew that yoga was associated with eastern mysticism and especially Hinduism, and I was fairly familiar with Hindu theology. In fact, in my B.C. days when I was searching for God, one of the first books I read was Autobiography of a Yogi by Paramahansa Yogananda, who was one of the first yoga masters to introduce yoga to the West. I read the Bhagavad Gita and meditated and chanted. Eventually, I became a member of a cult and had a guru. But after I received Jesus, I renounced all these associations, purged my library and got deliverance.

As a Christian, I had more understanding than most and believed I could not be beguiled again. I practiced a "de-mystified," westernized version of yoga based on exercise science. I scrupulously avoided all Hindu derived religious practices such as devotional music, chanting, meditation, guided visualization in Savasana (corpse pose), Namaste (bowing to others with prayer hands), and so on. The westernized version emphasized myology and kinesiology--the study of muscles and movement--and dove-tailed nicely with my work as a massage therapist. In my classes, I approached yoga as an exercise physiologist would and was very satisfied with the results. I felt grateful to use my gifts of movement and communication and teaching and thought I was empowering people to take charge of their health, all while doing something I loved. I even regarded yoga as an extension of Jesus' healing ministry through me.

Of course, I was aware that many Christians shun yoga as something demonic, but I felt confident that the style I was practicing and teaching was not only safe but wholesome. In my own private practice at home, I often played Christian worship music and worshipped the Lord on my mat. So how did I resolve the discrepancy in perspective between other sincere Christians and myself? I figured the discrepancy reflected different levels of faith: I had more faith. I was familiar with Hinduism as a false religion, had received some deliverance and obtained some measure of freedom, so I wasn't intimidated by it. I felt strong in faith like the Apostle Paul, that I could "partake of meat offered to idols" with a clear conscience and not be contaminated, because I had a relationship with the one true God and knew in my heart that the Hindu deities Brahman, Vishnu and Shiva are nothing. Also, I balked at the idea that the devil could have any intellectual property

right in certain body positions or movements. From a biomechanical standpoint, I knew that muscles can only be stretched or strengthened in certain positions. I thought God's design of the human body was none of the devil's business and that he could not restrict my freedom of movement. And because many yoga poses are similar or identical to positions in other legitimate, non-religious movement systems like dance, gymnastics and sports, I reasoned that the whole system was acceptable based on the acceptability of some of its parts. So I accepted entire sequences of poses like the sun and moon salutations and advanced poses like lotus and other poses unique to yoga due to the validity of basic poses that yoga shared in common with other forms of exercise.

However, I became suspicious of yoga after a pastor and prayer minister named Gary Hixson cast a demon of oriental medicine out of me with an unusual word of knowledge. He suggested that yoga was also demonic. Having been broadsided by the discovery that I had a demon of oriental medicine, I became open to the possibility that I might have a demon of yoga as well. Why? Because all eastern health practices and healing arts center on cultivating a mysterious life principle. Chinese call it Chi; Japanese call it Ki; Koreans, Thai and Vietnamese have their own names for it, and Indians call it prana. Prana is Sanskrit for "always moving" or "vital life". Westerners translate this concept as vital energy, life force, or bio-electricity, and regard it as a purely physical phenomenon, similar to the property of electromagnetism in the body. But in eastern cultures, the concept is not just physical; it links air, breath and spirit together, much like the Greek word pneuma. Health practices and healing arts that cultivate life force or vital energy typically involve breath control and intentionality--the application of human will to achieve a supernatural result through natural methods, for example, healing the psyche through the body or healing the body through the body. The expectation of a supernatural result requires faith, and faith is an invitation for the spirit realm to get involved in the activity. Basically, vital energy or life force is a substitute for the Holy Spirit; it is another spirit. The kind of the spirit depends on the culture: Chinese practices like Traditional Chinese Medicine and Tai Chi are likely to conjure up a Taoist spirit while Indian practices like Ayurvedic medicine and yoga are likely to conjure up a Hindu spirit.

Disturbed by the implications, I fasted and prayed to the Lord to show me whether yoga is also demonic, and He kindly gave me a nightmare. I found myself in a gym setting like the ones where I taught yoga. A woman was reclining on a yoga mat. She said to me, "I live here." Next to her, a gargantuan bodybuilder was doing a military press. Then I found myself in my home office, where I had prepared class materials like yoga syllabi, choreography, and handouts. I lit something like incense or pot, and the smoke arose. Then I looked out the window into my backyard and gasped. There was a huge, inflatable, phosphorescent altar to Hindu deities and a banqueting table with a place set for me. I was gripped with fear and wanted it cleared from my property, but a giant festive dragon flew like a kite or windsock up to the window and rattled its face at me. I cursed it and pounded on the window, but it wouldn't retreat until I yelled for Jesus. The nightmare exposed the presence of a strongman or demon of yoga, as depicted by the steroidal bodybuilder and the woman lying on a yoga mat

who said, "I live here," in other words, "I inhabit yoga and you." My lighting a fire to burn incense or pot portrays yoga as an act of worship with a subtle, beclouding, mind-altering influence, like intoxicating smoke permeating an atmosphere. The altar and banqueting table to Hindu deities equates yoga with communion and fellowship with Hindu deities or demons. Behind the Hindu deities is the dragon, or Satan. But one thing puzzled me. Why was the demonic portrayed in a toy-like manner? Why was the Hindu altar and banqueting table inflatable and glow-in-the-dark? Why was the dragon a kite or wind sock? The Lord showed me I was playing with something dangerous and didn't realize it: Yoga appeared as innocent to me as playthings to a child. At this point I offered to tear up my yoga instructor certifications, and the Lord approved, but something inside me hedged, no doubt the demon. I tore them up anyway.

Then I set a full length mirror in front of me because I wanted to see the demon of yoga manifest before expelling it. I commanded it to present itself. It first manifested as a pleasurable surge of energy--a full body rush to my head. But then a fierce, ugly, snake-like expression settled on my face. The upsurge of energy and the snake face were in line with Hindu paintings of kundalini energy coiled like a cobra at the base of the spine and rising to the third eye or crown of the head of the aspiring yogi. The demon first insisted that it served Christ, but after I pressured it with God's judgment, it admitted that it served Satan and that its nature was evil. Because I had wasted about ten years on this practice, I cross examined it by the power of the Holy Spirit. The main lie it tells believers in Christ is that yoga is purely physical and not at all spiritual--that it is strictly a health practice and exercise system with many benefits. By this deceit, it lures unwitting Christians into idolatry with promises of weight loss, physical fitness and stress reduction. The main lies it tells unbelievers is that they can have power and control over their lives, improve their sex life, and cultivate siddhis (supernatural powers in the Hindu system) like levitation, mental telepathy and telekinesis--byproducts of demonic activity.

After I cast out the demon, I purged my office of thousands of dollars worth of yoga books, videos, DVDs, and workshop manuals. I trashed teaching materials that I had painstakingly perfected over the years, including college syllabi, choreographed yoga classes and plans for a yoga video series. For a year afterward I searched the scriptures, and the Lord gave me understanding of why yoga is demonic. I share some of it here.

In its origin, design and intent, yoga is worship of Hindu deities. The word yoga means "to yoke" and by extension "union," as when two oxen are joined together under the same harness to plough a field. It refers to the yoking or union of the individual with the divine, and specifically, to Hindu deities. In India, hatha yoga is the physical path to the divine; the devotee dedicates his body to god through ritualistic exercise and hygiene practices. The centerpiece of yoga is the sun salutation in which an invisible entity receives homage through a series of bowing, kneeling and prostration poses and is entreated through a series of supplicatory skyward reaching poses and prayer gestures. Aside from the salute, many yoga poses represent Hindu deities and/or are designed to direct or contain energy flow, like canals and locks that channel or dam water.

Yoga is idolatry and incompatible with Christianity. Despite the practitioner's best intention, yoga cannot be divorced from its original purpose and redirected to some other use such as mere exercise or communion with the God of Abraham. Why? Because God does not accept a revised version of idolatry as a neutral activity or satisfactory form of worship. Christians may justify yoga as a great workout or as worship of the SON, not the SUN, but the intent and good will of the practitioner are not enough to make the practice acceptable. Why? Because the giver can give a gift that is acceptable to him but not the recipient. The critical question is not, Are you offering worship to the God of Abraham when you practice yoga? but, Is yoga an acceptable form of worship to the God of Abraham? There's a difference. The first perspective focuses on how the worshiper views the act of worship. The second focuses on how God views the act of worship. The worshiper may approve of something that God disapproves of; he may offer worship that pleases himself but not God. Admittedly, Christians ought to please God and not themselves. Offering God a form of worship that has already been consecrated to other gods is like giving God second-hand goods used by the devil; it's like giving your fiancée a recycled wedding ring previously worn by an arch enemy. There's no way to adequately describe the abhorrence God has for such offerings. They are abominable to Him. The Bible indicates that the God of Abraham is very prescriptive about what constitutes acceptable worship. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were expressly and repeatedly forbidden to offer sacrifices to God on pagan altars or to introduce pagan forms of worship in God's temple. Pagan altars are those built to other gods. Yoga is essentially a pagan altar.

Ez 8:16 specifically identifies sun worship as no trivial matter, but a turning of one's back to God and anathema to God. In the New Testament, Christians are forbidden to partake of anything or participate in anything that has been offered to idols: Acts 15:20, 28-29 (Amplified version): "Abstain from and avoid anything that has been polluted by being offered to idols. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to lay upon you any greater burden than these indispensable requirements: That you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols."

The Amplified gives the clearest meaning and broadest scope of application. Other translations such as the NIV and NKJ render the passage as, "Abstain from food offered to idols," which may seem antiquated and irrelevant to modern readers. But food can be understood in the figurative sense of what we live for, what gives us life and enlivens us, what inspires and motivates us, what enables and empowers us. Food can be anything that nourishes, sustains and supports a person--body, soul or spirit. Jesus used the word food figuratively when He said, "I have food to eat you know not of. My food is to do the will of Him who sent me," (John 4:34) and when He identified Himself as true spiritual food: "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed." (John 6:54-55).

Yoga may be food for the practitioner, but it is also food for demons: "Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What am I saying then? That an idol is anything or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, the things which the Gentiles [heathen, pagans] sacrifice they sacrifice to

demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?" (1 Corinthians 10:18-22)

This passage indicates that Christian worship and other forms of worship are mutually exclusive. Why? Not because other gods are real gods that threaten the one true living God, but because other gods are demons that threaten the Christian and offend God's love. In yoga, the mat is the altar, the practice is the sacrifice, and those who partake are the practitioner and Hindu demons. Put in starker terms, the mat is the altar, the practitioner is the sacrifice, and those who feed on the practitioner are Hindu demons. Yoga, at the very least, opens a Christian to demonic influence and at worst, demonization. Either way, demons will hinder the Christian's full potential in God; there will be inexplicable or ill defined pressures, resistance to the abundant life, and frustration. I know from personal experience. I pray that others who have been misled as I was will be undeceived: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

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