**WHAT’S WRONG WITH YOGA?**

**Mike Shreve**

In 1970 I faced a near-death experience that shook my world. I was a freshman at Florida State University, trying to decide between two majors: oceanography or orchestration. However, when I nearly passed from time into eternity, it made me realize the shallowness of my goals and that only two things were worth a complete commitment of my life: knowing God and discovering ultimate truth.

At the time, I had dismissed the idea of a biblical approach being my answer. Having been raised Catholic and never encountering God in that religion, I falsely assumed there was no supernatural reality to be found in any expression of Christianity. That made me even more susceptible to the influence of an Indian guru named Yogi Bhajan who came to the United States to spread his teachings on Kundalini Yoga.

He promised by following his regimen of *asanas* (physical yoga postures), *pranayama* (breathing exercises), meditation, and mantra chanting, devotees could achieve God-consciousness—a supernatural state of oneness with the Oversoul (a term for God). Wow! Achieving Ultimate Reality. The allure of that mystical approach captured my mind. Determined to reach that goal, I dropped out of college to study yoga full time, breaking out of the mold of an ordinary life.

Extreme discipline followed. From 3:30am every morning until 5pm at night, almost every hour was filled with yogic practices or reading the ‘holy books’ of various religions. I passionately pursued the goal. Eventually, I started my own yoga ashram in Tampa, Florida, and began teaching yoga classes at four Florida universities. Then, through a series of miraculous events, I had an encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ that radically changed my heart, my life, and my worldview.

The very day I was “born again,” I renounced the practice of yoga and was delivered by the power of God. I immediately understood, by divine inspiration, that only Jesus can bring salvation. So, I shut down my ashram and canceled all my classes. Once exposed to the Word of God and influenced by the Spirit of God, my mind was enlightened. I realized the yoga path was a futile attempt to reach the Creator. Worse than that, it was a door leading to dark, demonic influences.

Consider the following concerns:

1. **Yoga postures are dedicated to Hindu gods**—Each yoga posture is designed to be an act of worship toward an individual Hindu deity: honoring the deity, imitating some act or characteristic of the deity, and invoking that deity to manifest in the heart and life of the practitioner. For instance, the “Standing pose” is dedicated to Vishnu (the preserver-god in Hinduism), the “Goddess Pose” is dedicated to Kali (the vicious, vile goddess of death), and the “Dancer Pose” is dedicated to Shiva (the god of death, also called “The Lord of Yoga”).
2. **A divine essence is assigned to breath**—According to Hindu teaching, a vital life force (a divine essence) permeates everything called *prana*. That’s why breathing exercises are called *pranayama.* The belief is: by controlling and deepening the breath, the intake of prana is increased. By this process, higher consciousness can be attained. My response is an acrostic using the word “YOGA”—**Y**ou **O**nly **G**et **A**ir. No one can breathe his way into a relationship with God. It’s not that mechanical.
3. **Chanting mantras brings spiritual awakening—**The “yoga” experience usually involves chanting mantras. The most popular is the single syllable “OM,” believed to be the primal sound that accompanied the manifestation of the universe. Hindus insist that by chanting this word, a meditator can attain oneness with the cosmic vibration of the Impersonal Absolute (God on the highest level). Jesus warned against this kind of practice, saying:

 *“When you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words” (Matthew 6:7).*

We would never attempt to communicate with fellow human beings by repeating the same phrase thousands of times. Why approach God with such a practice? He is the Everlasting Father, a personal God who cares for His own, not a ‘Force’ manipulated by the right incantation.

1. **The goal of yoga is to “awaken the Kundalini”—**The primary purpose of the physical exercises, breathing disciplines, meditating, and chanting is “the awakening of the Kundalini.” The word “kundalini” means serpent power, conceived to be the dormant essence of the Divine within every human being. It is supposedly coiled like a serpent at the base of the spine. Once awakened, it travels upward to the crown of the head. At that moment, the yoga devotee is said to experience Samadhi (the bliss of oneness with God). However, when Jesus was in this world, He boldly claimed:

 *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).*

This “serpent power” is a demonic counterfeit from the Prince of darkness and does not lead anyone to a relationship with God.

1. **The word “yoga” means yoke—**The word “yoga” comes from an original Sanskrit word *yug* that means yoke. Symbolically, it represents being “yoked” with Brahman (the impersonal Life Force many Hindus and New Agers believe is Ultimate Reality). However, that view is a misrepresentation of the true nature of God. Instead, those seeking truth should respond to the gracious invitation of the Lord Jesus:

 ***“****Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).*

The “yoke” of yoga is hard and never brings a person to true salvation.

The “yoke” of Jesus is light in comparison: being filled with God’s love and the transforming power of truth.

 (For a detailed story of Mike Shreve’s conversion, go to [www.thetruelight.net](http://www.thetruelight.net) and download the free e-book, *The Highest Adventure: Encountering God.*)