

A Controversial Newsletter "The Printed Voice of Summit Theological Seminary"

~ All Articles are Written by George L. Faull, Rel. D. Unless Otherwise Stated ~

Vol. 31 No. 1

January 2018

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"Holy Yoga"

By Terry Carter

A couple of days ago I passed a church building whose sign announced "Holy Yoga". At first my mind went back to the Batman television show from the 1960's. I could imagine Robin saying, "Holy yoga Batman, how did we ever get ourselves into this position?" After that moment of lightheartedness, I asked myself if there really is any such thing as "holy yoga".

It seems that we live in a world where people believe we can Christianize and sanctify anything by simply putting the word "holy" in front of it. That supposedly makes it acceptable for Christians who are trying to be holy as we are commanded to do. But does that really make anything holy? Who gets to decide what is holy and what is not? Is it man or God who decides?

I think it is clear that God decides, not man. After all, He is Holy. Surely we can agree that there is no such thing as "holy lying", "holy stealing", "holy coveting", "holy fornication", etc. It takes more than putting the word "holy" in front of something to actually make it Holy.

So what about yoga? Is it holy? Can it be made holy? The topic is too broad to deal with thoroughly in such a short article, but consider the following:

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines yoga as, "A Hindu theistic philosophy teaching the suppression of all activity of body, mind, and will in order that the self may realize its distinction from them and obtain liberation."

The *American Heritage College Dictionary* defines yoga as, "A Hindu discipline aimed at training the consciousness for a state of perfect spiritual insight and tranquility".

Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia defines yoga as, "One of the systems of orthodox Hindu philosophy, Yoga, which is Sanskrit for 'union,' seeks the union of the

individual with the divine by means of exercise, breathing, posture, diet, and meditation. The most popular form of yoga, particularly in the Western world, is a type called hatha-yoga. Those who practice hatha-yoga seek to improve their health and sense of well-being by learning body control through a series of breathing exercises, by assuming special postures, and through concentration."

The 1964 *Encyclopedia Britannica* says the following in its article on yoga: "Hatha Yoga is based on a fantastic physiological theory, teaching the existence of a dormant divine potency, called *kundalini*, "the serpent power," at the base of the spine.

A vein known as *sushumna*, runs through the backbone, linking the *kundalini*, by way of six psychic centers (called *chakras*, or "wheels") with the supreme center of psychic power at the top of the skull, called *sahasrara*, and described as a lotus with a thousand petals. The aim of a yogi, according to this system, should be to raise the feminine *kundalini* through the vein *sushumna* from one *chakra* to another until at last it unites with the masculine *sahasrara*, when full salvation is achieved."

The exercises and practice of yoga were not designed for the physical effects they produce on our body as much as for the spiritual effects they were thought to have on our minds and souls.

There are lots of effective exercise programs out there without all the Hindu, serpent power baggage. There is simply no need to dabble in such paganism.

God told the Israelites not to worship Him in the way the heathen nations worshipped their gods. He calls it "an abomination", **Deuteronomy 12:1-4, 29-32**.

Paul reminded Timothy that bodily exercise profits little, but godliness is profitable for all things, **I Timothy 4:8**.

If we really want to be holy, we ought to focus more on godliness and less on pagan practices.

