



Yoga and Christianity

A Conversation - Knoff Yoga Student Moji Akingbade and Master Teacher James Bryan

Dear Nicky and James

I hope you are both well.

I would like to ask you both for some feedback on the subject of Christians and the practice of yoga - if you do not mind :-).

I am somewhat reconciled with my approach coming from the perspective that Yoga is not a religion - however for my personal practice in setting my intentions I refer to scripture as that is what I feel comfortable with. The bible is full of positive affirmations which I find helpful in getting me through day to day life. I start the day with prayers as it sets the tone for the day and then I get on my mat when time permits. On average 4x a week thanks to the Discovery course. The course has made such a difference in my life in that I can just get on the mat and practice with an inbuilt flow to guide me. I could not have achieved that by just following videos. The latter obviously helps to cement the learning from the course.

Anyway, I received an interesting request yesterday (at church) from a good friend and church elder. I am aware that there are a number of Christians at my church including me practicing yoga. On the other hand, there are members of our church who frown on the practice of Yoga and as you are aware this is not common to India. However, I find the concern more prevalent amongst Christians in India due to the Hindu roots of Yoga. Iyengar confirms the Hindu roots in his book, 'The Tree of Yoga'. He also clarifies that Yoga is a universal culture and highlights that it is not only to be practiced by Hindus. It is available for all. I know you know this. I am just sharing my understanding and take away from the book.

In the west, the emphasis tends to be (from what I have witnessed) on the physical part of Yoga practice and how well one can hold a pose. I am referring to the yoga schools that have popped up with their variation of yoga. Whereas in India the teacher's primary aim is at the whole essence of Yoga highlighting the pranayama and meditation aspects. The latter in particular and the levels of Yoga beyond are what tends to throw Indian Christians off. I can understand where they are coming from however at the same time from my very little knowledge gained since deciding that I would like to teach Yoga, I see some misinformation down the line and an important need for better clarification so that more people could enjoy yoga without feeling that they are compromising on their beliefs/ faith.

So back to the question from my friend and church elder. He asked me if I had any material about Yoga that would help clarify what role religion (whichever that is) plays if at all. Basically, the church (that I attend) wants to take a view and I am pleased to say an informed one. Rather than just preaching yoga is bad. Not that I have witnessed this however it is in the air so to speak. The openness to discuss I view as progression and an opportunity for healthy discussion on the subject. Hence if you have any points to share or material that you could direct me to I would be most grateful.

I thought Iyengar's book "The Tree of Yoga " would be helpful.

In my Christian life journey, so far, I am trying to make Yoga part of that journey without watering down the value of the practice. As I take steps towards the goal to teach others I want to ensure that I will be doing justice to the practice without compromising on my faith.

No judgement - one of the key teachings in the New Testament.

Blessings

Moji Akingbade

Dear Moji

There is so much rubbish taught in yoga and added to it that I am surprised that anyone has a clear idea of what yoga actually is.

I am not a scholar, but I can assure you that Knoff Yoga is non-religious. We put the 'ship of yoga' into dry dock and stripped back the hull to the bare metal. We cleaned away all the accumulated debris and relaunched a smooth, clean ship comprising of asana, pranayama, meditation and yoga philosophy. Yoga philosophy is a huge topic, but essentially it includes anything that uplifts humanity.

By bringing the practice back to the body/mind, the focus in on energizing the physical body, elevating the mind and evolving the spirit (life-force). The life-force is easy to understand when you compare a corpse to a living person. If you haven't seen a dead person, then compare a dead bird to a live bird - a big difference.

The physical body can be compared to a computer's hardware, the mind to the software, and the spirit to the electricity animating it. Your personal belief is the programming. The programming will perform better when the hardware and software are operating optimally.

Because Knoff Yoga brings clarity to the mind, individual programming becomes observable. At this point you can then decide if your programming is acceptable or needs to be changed. You are a committed Christian with a firm conviction, so your beliefs (programming) and mind (software) are congruent, with no need to change.

Many people find that their beliefs are not aligned with their daily lives and there is often room for change/improvement. A mundane example would be someone who believes they are environmentally minded, but drives a large SUV. In Australia SUVs now outsell all other types of vehicles. If you ask most people, they will tell you they are concerned about the environment, yet their actions tell a different story.

Yoga philosophy teaches that you are in charge of your programming, in fact no one has access to your mind but yourself, so you are responsible. If you don't like what is in there, change it.

I do believe that the practice of Knoff Yoga will change people because the increased consciousness that comes from the practice spills over into the rest of your life. Becoming aware of the action of your feet (Pada Bandha) and learning how to control them, results in more consciousness. Once this consciousness becomes activated you can't switch it off - unless you indulge in alcohol or drugs.

Consciousness is a great gift and needs to be cultivated. Knoff Yoga provides the tools for doing this. It is up to you what you do with your gift.

Namaste

James E. Bryan

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