

"But I'm just doing the exercises!"

These six little words are the mainstay of the multi-billion dollar yoga market in America, but just like most catchy marketing slogans, it leaves a lot unsaid.

Perhaps the single most damning piece of evidence weighing against the "yoga is just exercise" belief can be found in the fact that yoga is a Hindu spiritual practice that was never meant to be an exercise program.

As Fr. Mitch Pacwa states in his book, *Catholics and the New Age*, " . . . (H)indus did not devise these exercises [asanas] for athletic limbering or muscle building. All were meant to lead the practitioner to enlightenment and awareness of his or her inner divinity" (pg. 33).

In other words, the "exercises" aren't "just exercises".

Instead, they are integrally associated with the worship of Hindu gods, which is why famed yogi, B.K.S. Iyengar writes in his book, *Light on Yoga*, that some yoga positions "are also called after gods of the Hindu pantheon and some recall the Avatars or incarnation of Divine Power."

For example, in the Sun Salutation asana, one is yogically paying homage to Surya, the Hindu Sun deity. The Cobra asana worships the kundalini snake which is supposedly awakened in the chakras. The fish asana (Matsyasana) worships the Hindu deity Vishnu. The Warrior worships Lord Virabhadra. The Downward Dog asana reenacts the Hindu worship of the dog as happens for five days each November, and the

Corpse asana represents the death or extinction of the person when yogic unification with the Hindu deity Brahman wipes out one's own identity and existence.

The spiritual nature of yoga is also evident in seemingly innocent practices such as the Namaste bow, which actually means "I bow to the god within you".

Hindus believe the OM chant used in many classes is the sound that Brahman makes in every creative act and that we contain this original sound in our memory. The repetition of this sound is meant to invite Brahman and all the Hindu gods to enter the practitioner and thus speed up the process of enlightenment.

"But I'm not worshiping other gods!"

Many people believe they can practice yoga with impunity because they do not have the required intention of worshiping other gods which would make this practice a sin against the First Commandment.

While intentionality is indeed necessary for something to be a sin, there are other ways that we can sin through the practice of yoga.

Romans 14 clearly tells us "do not be a stumbling block to your brother" – even if you disagree with their position. As long as a fellow Christian is troubled by what you're doing, and you continue to do it anyway, "your conduct is no longer in accord with love" (vs. 15).

Scripture is full of examples of this teaching. Consider the way Eleazar behaved in 2

Maccabees (3:18-31) when he refused to eat the pork being offered. Because his refusal meant death, his friends took him aside and said, "Look, just eat this beef and we'll pretend it's pork – that way you won't be sinning against your God." But Eleazar refused. "No, because people could still be led astray by me." Others wouldn't know it was beef, and his eating it could cause them to think eating pork was not a sin – a chance he was unwilling to take.

In other words, if people in your family or your parish, are scandalized by your practice of yoga – stop doing it.

And even if you're not scandalizing anyone, or worshiping Hindu gods, this doesn't mean you can escape harm from a practice which regularly calls upon pagan gods. The reason is because demons hide behind these nonexistent gods.

Both Tertullian and St. Justin Martyr taught that even though pagan gods aren't real, their names and images "were employed by unclean spirits, fallen angels, demons of pagan philosophical tradition, in order to take honor upon themselves and from God."

Maybe you're not worshiping these gods, but what about the guy next to you in class? What if he's calling upon the sun god and a demon decides to answer him? Demons couldn't care less who invoked them. When they're called, they come and whoever is in the vicinity is in danger.

This is why Bishop Edward Slattery warned people against attending a black mass out of mere curiosity at the Oklahoma City Civic Center in 2014. Just being there puts them in grave

danger of infection by the spirits called down during this ritual, he said. In fact, depending on their state of grace, they could be risking outright possession.

"But my yoga instructor doesn't do any meditation or breathing exercises!"

Just because a teacher doesn't introduce a practice that might induce an altered state of consciousness – which is what the breathing and meditation aspect of yoga is designed to do – doesn't mean that you won't enter into an altered state while doing yoga. This is because the body naturally begins to breathe in a certain way while holding particular poses and this could, in fact, induce such a state.

Prominent yogi Iyengar Yogacharia said, "the 'mere' practice of asana has the potential to induce a meditative state. This spontaneously occurs based on each unique individual and can happen at any unpredictable time from early in practice for a novice to one who is very advanced."

"But I'm doing Christian yoga!"

In a way, Christian yoga is even worse than the yoga being practiced "just for exercise". This is because in so-called Christian yoga, we are now taking a pagan religious practice and using it to worship our God. In *Deuteronomy 12:31* the Lord specifically warns us not to worship Him the way the pagans do.

Even more problematic is that today's "Christian yoga" is based upon earlier, theologically flawed works such as that of Nancy Roth (*Invitation to Christian Yoga*, 1989). Roth was an Episcopalian

priest, whose intent was to create a new form of Christian asceticism when she fashioned Christian yoga. As a result, her work is based on her idea of what Christianity should be, not what it actually is. Her predecessors, such as Brooke Boone (*Holy Yoga*) and Susan Bordenkircher (*Yoga for Christians*) created programs that are also riddled with theological errors about both Christianity and yoga.

But "Christian yoga" is destined to be flawed because it's fundamental premise – the blending of Christianity with Hinduism – is impossible. For example, Christianity is monotheistic (one God) and Hinduism is polytheistic (many gods). Christians believe that man dies but once (Catechism No. 1013) while Hinduism believes in reincarnation. Attempts to join these two is a classic example of syncretism, which is an attempt to merge two opposing philosophies.

In *A Call to Vigilance: Pastoral Instruction on New Age*, Bishop Alberto Carerra makes this quite clear: "However much proponents insist that these techniques are valuable as methods, and imply no teaching contrary to Christianity, the techniques in themselves . . . in their own context, the postures and exercises, are designed for their specific religious purpose. Even when they are carried out within a Christian atmosphere, the intrinsic meaning of these gestures remains intact."

If it really is "just exercise", a person should be able to quit without being troubled. If not, it's already more than "just exercise"!

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Yoga



***Is It Just
Exercise?***

