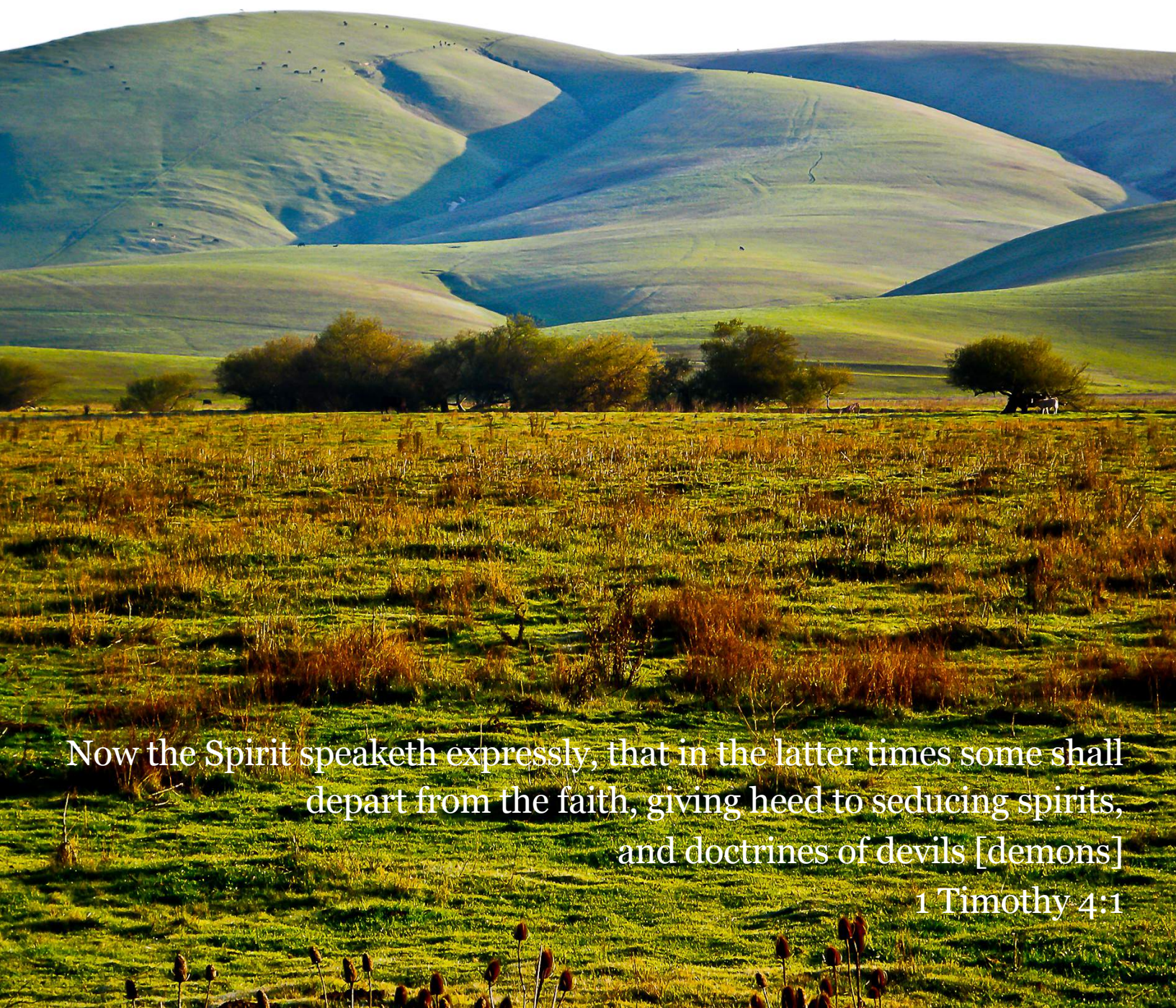


YOGA AND CHRISTIANITY

Yoga And Christianity - Are They Compatible? (Excerpt)



Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils [demons]

1 Timothy 4:1



YOGA AND CHRISTIANITY

Yoga And Christianity - Are They Compatible? (Excerpt)

Dear Friends,

As previously mentioned in last months update, our newly published booklet is now available through Lighthouse Trails Publishers at www.lighthouse Trails.com. The following is an excerpt from the booklet.

YOGA and Christianity – Are They Compatible?

By Chris Lawson

Western Culture Embraces Yoga

It is no secret that Yoga is taking Western civilization by storm. In just a little over a hundred years, a mystical revolution has occurred that millions of Westerners have wholeheartedly embraced. Amazingly, the Western Judeo-Christian view is in the process of a paradigm shift toward the same perspective as yogic India.

To illustrate the magnitude of the Yoga explosion, consider *Yoga Journal's* "Yoga in America Study 2012." This study reveals some incredible statistics:

- 20.4 million Americans practice Yoga, compared to 15.8 million from the previous 2008 study.
- Practitioners spend \$10.3 billion a year on Yoga classes and products. The previous estimate from the 2008 study was \$5.7 billion.
- Of current non-practitioners, 44.4 percent of Americans call themselves "aspirational yogis"—people who are interested in trying Yoga.¹

Yoga (or Yogic spirituality) is influencing Christians and non-Christians alike. It only takes 0.27 seconds to come up with over 411,000,000 results for Yoga on Google's search engine. When searching Amazon.com's "All" category for Yoga, one quickly comes up with a staggering 143,081 results. That's just within Amazon.Com. If one searches for book titles only on Amazon.com, the search yields 26,316. Certainly, the influence of Yoga can be found almost everywhere. In *Time Magazine's* book, *Alternative Medicine: Your Guide to Stress Relief, Healing, Nutrition, and More*, it states:

Hard to believe now, but yoga was once considered heretical, and even dangerous. As recently as a century ago, yogis in America were viewed with suspicion; some were actually thrown in jail. Today, though, most gyms offer it, many public schools teach it, and a growing number of doctors prescribe it . . . It may have taken 5,000 years, but yoga has arrived.²

Just What is Yoga?

No doubt, many, probably most, of the millions of Westerners who practice *postural Yoga* have never read a simple definition of what Yoga really is. Below, I have presented a small selection of definitions of Yoga. While there are countless descriptions on the Internet and in libraries, the definitions I have chosen are an accurate overall representation of the meaning of Yoga.

According to *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*, Yoga is essentially: "a practice involving intense and complete concentration upon something, especially deity, in order to establish identity of consciousness with the object of concentration; it is a mystic and ascetic practice, usually involving the discipline of prescribed postures, controlled breathing, etc."³

The *Merriam Webster Online Dictionary* adds: "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 attain liberation."⁴

Cyndi Lee, expert yogi and writer for *Yoga Journal*, defines Yoga as such:

The word yoga, from the Sanskrit* word *yuj* means to yoke or bind and is often interpreted as "union" . . . The Indian sage Patanjali is believed to have collated the practice of yoga into the Yoga Sutra an estimated 2,000 years ago.

The Sutra is a collection of 195 statements that serves as a philosophical guidebook for most of the yoga that is practiced today. It also outlines eight limbs of yoga: the *yamas* (restraints), *niyamas* (observances), *asana* (postures), *pranayama* (breathing), *pratyahara* (withdrawal of senses), *dharana* (concentration), *dhyani* (meditation), and *samadhi* (absorption).⁵

Goutam Paul, author of *Bhagavad Gita: The Ultimate Science of Yoga* states:

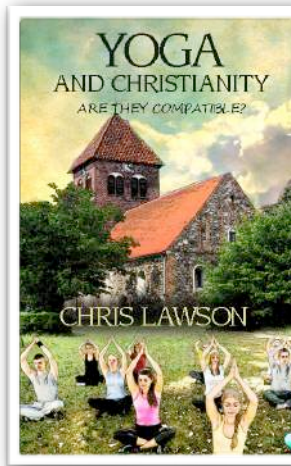
When we talk about linking or connection, an obvious question arises: to connect what with what? The very word "connection" implies that there must be two different entities separated from one another, and they need to be connected. The ancient Vedic* text *Bhagavad Gita* explains that these entities are the individual consciousness and the universal Supreme

consciousness. Some may call this universal consciousness an all-pervading energy, whereas most theists consider this Supreme consciousness to be God. . . . The purpose of Yoga is to connect the individual energy with the universal energy, or put another way, to connect the individual being to its source—the Supreme Being.⁶

One large online archive of New Age, occult, and mysticism-oriented literature states:

The ancient Yogis recognised long ago that in order to accomplish the highest stage of yoga, which is the realisation of the self, or God consciousness, a healthy physical body is essential. For when we are sick, our attention is seldom free enough to contemplate the larger reality, or to muster the energy for practice. . . .

The roots of Yoga can be traced back roughly 5,000 years to the Indus Valley civilization. . . . According to the Yoga



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Sutras of Patanjali, the ultimate aim of Yoga is to reach "Kaivalya" (freedom). This is the experience of one's innermost being or "soul" (the Purusa). When this level of awareness is achieved, one becomes free of the chains of cause and effect (Karma) which bound us to continual reincarnation.⁷

The Index of Cults and New Religions lists the different types of Yoga:

Karma Yoga (spiritual union through correct conduct)

Bhakti Yoga (spiritual union through devotion to a Guru)

Juana Yoga (spiritual union through hidden knowledge)

Raja Yoga (spiritual union through mental control)

Hatha Yoga (spiritual union through body control/meditation)

Kundalini Yoga (spiritual union through focusing inner energy)

Tantra Yoga (spiritual union through sexual practices)⁸

Swami Nirmalananda Giri of the Atma Jvoti Ashram, answering the question to "What is Yoga?" states:

What do we join through yoga? Two eternal beings: God, the Infinite Being, and the individual spirit that is finite being. In essence they are one, and according to yogic philosophy all spirits originally dwelt in consciousness of that oneness.⁹

The Concise Dictionary of the Occult and New Age describes how Yoga is done:

Typical exercises, such as those found in *hatha* yoga, are practiced under the tutelage of a guru or yogi, a personal religious guide and spiritual teacher. Gurus teach students to combine a variety of breathing techniques with *asanas*, or relaxation postures. In each of the postures, students must first enter the position, then maintain it for a certain length of time, and finally leave it.¹⁰

This dictionary further states that people in the West have mistaken Yoga to be "mere breathing and relaxation exercises," when in reality "[t]he practice of yoga serves as a gateway to Eastern mysticism and occult thinking."¹¹ It adds:

Certain postures, such as the lotus position, are taken to activate the psychic energy centers [the chakras]. And specific breathing exercises are practiced to infuse the soul with cosmic energy floating in the air. A guru might have students gaze at a single object, such as a candle, to develop and focus concentration. The guru might have

them chant a mantra to clear their minds and become one with the object in front of them. The goal is to achieve increasingly higher meditative states until reaching oneness with the cosmic consciousness.¹²

Understanding the Meaning of "Occult"

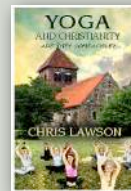
The word "occult" comes from the Latin *occultus* or "hidden," and those who employ the term generally do so in an attempt to describe secret and mysterious supernatural powers or magical (magick) religious rituals.

Throughout history, there have been those who attempted to gain supernatural power or knowledge through occult means. Occultism also can generally refer to witchcraft, Satanism, neo-paganism, or any of the various forms of psychic discernment such as astrology, séances, palm reading, and a myriad of other spiritual methodologies for contact with the spirit world. The term occult is often interchangeable with the term metaphysics—these terms share the belief that there is a universal energy (e.g., Chi, Prana, Ki, etc.) that exists in all things. By engaging in the occult (i.e., metaphysical arts), this energy is awakened. Yoga in all its forms is simply one spiritual genre among many designed to induce practitioners into altered states, thereby gaining access into the world of occult spirituality.

Endnotes:

1. "Yoga in America Study 2012" (*Yoga Journal*, http://www.yogajournal.com/press/yoga_in_america).
2. Lesley Alderman, "Bend and Be Well," *Alternative Medicine: Your Guide to Stress Relief, Healing, Nutrition, and More* (New York, NY: TIME Books, 2012), p.62.
3. *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, Unabridged, 2nd ed., Deluxe Color 1955, 1983), p. 2120.
4. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/yoga>.
5. http://www.yogajournal.com/newtoyoga/820_1.cfm.
6. Goutam Paul, *Bhagavad Gita: The Ultimate Science of Yoga* (<http://www.cs.albany.edu/~goutam/ScYogaCamera.pdf>).
7. <http://www.experiencefestival.com/yoga>.
8. <http://www.sullivan-county.com/id3/exposer.htm#Y>.
9. http://www.atmajvoti.org/med_what_is_yoga.asp.
10. Debra Lardie, contributing editors Dan Lioy and Paul Ingram, *Concise Dictionary of the Occult and New Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000), pp. 288-289.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*

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- Chris Lawson

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