

Knowing the Facts about Yoga
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[Info at a Glance](#)

Description. The occult use of breathing exercises, particular physical postures, and meditation for alleged improved mental functioning, health maintenance, and spiritual enlightenment.

Founder. Unknown; one of the major developers is Patanjali, compiler of the classical Yogasutras of raja yoga.

How does it claim to work? The physical exercises of yoga are believed to prevent diseases and maintain health through bodily regulation of prana or mystical life energy. Furthermore, because the body is viewed as a crude layer of mind, various manipulations of the physical body (some severe) can affect the mind, bringing alleged enlightenment. In Hindu mythology, the serpent goddess *kundalini* "rests" at the base of the spine. She is aroused by yoga practice, travels up the spine while regulating prana and opening the body's alleged psychic centers (*chakras*), finally

reaching the top (crown) *chakra*, permitting the merging of Shiva/Shakti and occult enlightenment.

Scientific evaluation. Yogic (e.g., psychic) powers and abilities have been scientifically studied, such as Elmer Green's widely reported research with Swami Rama. Because yoga is essentially an occult practice leading to the manifestation of *siddhis* (psychic abilities), such research is often parapsychological. Yoga, like meditation and visualization, can have physical, psychological, and spiritual effects. Science may study these, but it cannot evaluate the spiritual or occult claims made for them (e.g., that they reflect evidence of "higher" consciousness or spiritual "enlightenment").

Examples of occult potential. Yoga practice involves occult meditation, the development of psychic powers, and may result in spirit contact or spirit possession.

Major problems. The public perception of yoga as a safe, spiritually neutral practice is false. It is difficult, if not impossible, to separate yoga practice from yoga theory. The one who engages in yoga practices for health purposes may also find himself converted to an occult way of life.

Biblical/Christian evaluation. Because yoga is an occult practice, it is prohibited.

Potential dangers. Authoritative yoga literature is replete with warnings of serious physical consequences, mental derangement, or harmful spiritual effects.

Note: See also refs. 249 and 278. Different Eastern or mystical religions practice different forms of yoga. Even in a given religion there are various kinds of schools, depending on the emphasis. In Hinduism, we find *hatha* (physical yoga), *raja* (mental yoga), *bhakti* (devotional yoga), *jana* (the yoga of knowledge), *siddha* (the yoga of psychic powers), *karma* (the yoga of action or social responsibility), *laya* or *mantra* (the yoga of sound), and other yogas. *Kundalini* may be labeled as a separate yoga; however, all yoga has the potential to arouse kundalini. Although the emphasis may vary, the basic goal in all yoga is the same: union with ultimate reality, however defined. In Hinduism this would be union of the individual self (*atman*) with the supreme self (*paramatman*), itself one with Brahman, the highest impersonal Hindu God; in Buddhism it would be union with Nirvana.

Introduction and Influence

For millions of Americans, yoga is a popular pastime. Yoga classes are regularly offered by the YMCA, the YWCA, in New Age and business seminars, on TV, and in church programs. Here the claim is often made that yoga practice is not religious and that members of any faith or persuasion can benefit from a yoga program. For example, several books attempt to integrate yoga practice and Christian faith (590). Promoters make such claims as, "Yoga and Christianity are founded upon a similar base of wisdom" (591:2).

More and more, health professionals are now advocating yoga as a safe and effective method for physical and mental health. Dr. Norman Shealy, who has taught at Harvard and is the founder of the American Holistic Medical Association, recommends hatha yoga along with "the power of crystals" as an "essential component" of national health programs of the near future (108:58). Steve Brena, M.D., attempts to merge yogic concepts and modern medicine in his *Yoga and Medicine* (965).

A modern alternate health guide claims that "all the chronic diseases are specially amenable to yoga treatment" (727:144). The guide asserts that illnesses responding to yoga include asthma,

backache, arthritis, bronchitis, high blood pressure, obesity, sinusitis, nervous disorders, constipation, dysmenorrhea, dyspepsia, and others. "The chief value of yoga ... is in prevention of illness ..." (727:143-44). With claims like this widely circulated and a growing healthcare crisis, it is no wonder yoga is extensively practiced in America today.

In the new spiritual climate of America in general, the stress on yoga is both as a path to spiritual enlightenment and a means to physical and mental health (so-called "therapeutic yoga"):

The aim of therapeutic Yoga is to maintain healthy minds and healthy bodies, but its practices are being increasingly used to produce cures or alleviations of disease. Yoga works on the premise that most illness is caused by wrong posture, wrong diet and wrong mental attitudes, which imbalances are under the control of the student (patient) himself.

Yoga is a philosophy embracing every aspect of human life, spiritual, emotional, mental and physical. It did not set out to be a therapy, but is being used as such today. It is a system of self-improvement, or "conscious evolution" (188:221).

Indeed, in modern America, people use yoga for a wide variety of purposes:

People take up Yoga to reduce nervous tension by learning to relax, to slim and to become more agile mentally and physically. Eventually yoga leads them to meditation, thence to modifications of personal and social behavior. Students attending regular classes become more relaxed, more supple and clearer headed, and usually begin to question the purpose of life in a way they have not before. This holistic approach leads to better health, and the improvement or eradication of psychosomatic ailments.

It is in the field of psychosomatic ailments that Yoga therapy can be most effective (188:221,222).