

Yoga: Religion Or Just Physical Exercise?

By Noel Deane

WITH the beginning of a New Year some people may be thinking of learning yoga as it seems the in thing to do. However, when yoga is mentioned one should keep in mind that it is not new. It is about 5,000 years old or more and it comes from the ancient Hindu tradition of India with its many so-called gods. Some say that the spiritual side of yoga can only be practised when the body is fit, this is probably why Hatha Yoga the only yoga discipline that involves physical movement is promoted so much.

People are given the idea that yoga is just physical exercise but is this, the full meaning? In their 2004 book, *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Yoga: A Practical Guide to Healing Body, Mind, and Spirit* by Deepak Chopra M.D. and David Simon M.D., explain: "The essential purpose of yoga is the integration of all the layers of life - environmental, physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root yuj, which means to unite. It is related to the English word yoke. A farmer yoking two oxen to pull his plough is performing an

action that hints at the essence of a spiritual experience. At its core, yoga means union, the union of body, mind, and soul; the union of the ego and the spirit; the union of the mundane and the divine." (Page 10)

On page 23 of the same book it can be read: "The generally recognized founder of yoga philosophy is the legendary sage Maharishi Patanjali, whose life is shrouded in the mists of myth and history. According to one story, his mother, Gonnika, was praying for a child to Lord Vishnu, the god who maintains the universe. Vishnu was so moved by her purity and devotion that he asked his beloved cosmic serpent, Ananta, to prepare for human incarnation. A tiny speck of Anantas celestial body fell into Gonnika's upturned palms. She nurtured this cosmic seed with her love until it developed into a baby boy. She named her child Patanjali from the word pat, meaning descended from heaven, and anjali, the word for her praying posture. This being, whose life historians date back two centuries before the birth of Christ, elaborated the principles of yoga for the benefit of humanity. In chapter 4, *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Yoga* are presented.

There are three major components to the Law of

Dharma. The first is that your ultimate purpose is to discover your higher Self. Pursue the god or goddess inside you that wants to express the sacred purpose for which you were born. Awaken to the unbounded, eternal witnessing awareness that is the essence of who you are and know yourself as a timeless, eternal Being in the midst of time-bound experience. (Page 69-70)

I looked up the word, Ananta in the book, *The Encyclopedia of Gods*; Ananta: Snake god. Hindu (Puranic). One of a group of seven snake deities or mahaganas, (Page 18). The Bible also refers to a global serpent; The serpent was the craftiest of all the creatures the Lord God had made. So the serpent came to the woman. "Really?" he asked. "None of you mustn't eat any of it?" "Of course we may eat it," the woman told him. "It's only the fruit from the tree at the centre of the garden that we are not to eat. God says we mustn't eat it or even touch it, or we will die." "That's a lie!" the serpent hissed. "You'll not die! God knows very well that the instant you eat it you will become like him, for your eyes will be opened—you will be able to distinguish good from evil!" The woman was convinced.

How lovely and fresh looking it was! And it would make her so wise! So she ate some of the fruit and gave some to her husband, and he ate it too. (Genesis 3:1-6)

In May 2001, I read a review of a book promoting Hatha Yoga in a magazine that promotes Yoga called, YOGA & HEALTH and a part of this review is; Yoga is not a physical fitness system. It is not a religion, a cult, a New Age fad. It requires no strange beliefs, no blind faith. There is no need for penance, confession, humiliation or self-denial. *The soul purpose of all aspects of yoga is to transcend the self, which does require penance, confession, humility and self-denial.* It is not a way of life with a predetermined set of values and conventions. *It most definitely is a way of life; i.e., the Dharma or spiritual lifestyle of Sanatan Dharma/Hinduism.* You do not need to burn incense or wear prayer beads. You do not need to give up onions, meat, tobacco, alcohol, sex or money. Hatha Yoga is a spiritual practice. It is a means of clarifying that which is and expressing it directly, fully and harmoniously. It is, then, both a science and an art. There is rigour, objectivity and revelation in its method. There is harmony, beauty and inspiration in its expression. (YOGA & HEALTH, May 2001 issue, Page 29, 31 and 32). I sent the entire article by e-mail to the CLASSICAL YOGA HINDU ACADEMY and underneath is a small part of their reply (in italics).

Yoga is not a physical fitness system. *There is definitely physical fitness involved - this a primary focus in Hatha Yoga.*

It is not a religion, a cult, a New Age fad. *It most definitely is a religion, the religion of Hinduism and there are cultic aspects in the sense of intense devotion to a particular Deity and Guru.* It requires no strange beliefs, no blind faith. There is no need for penance, confession, humiliation or self-denial.

The soul purpose of all aspects of yoga is to transcend the self, which does require penance, confession, humility and self-denial.

It is not a way of life with a predetermined set of values and conventions. *It most definitely is a way of life; i.e., the Dharma or spiritual lifestyle of Sanatan Dharma/Hinduism.*

You do not need to burn incense or wear prayer beads. You do not need to give up onions, meat, tobacco, alcohol, sex or money. *These blind assertions are too absurd to even comment.*

Hatha Yoga is a spiritual practice. It is a means of clarifying that which is and expressing it directly, fully and harmoniously. *It is, then,*

both a science and an art. There is rigour, objectivity and revelation in its method. There is harmony, beauty and inspiration in its expression. *What he just described (without realizing it) is the spiritual/religious lifestyle and in this case Hinduism.*

As I see it,

Yoga

Obstrcuts

God's

Atonement

There are a number of ways to get oneself fit and to become wise. I may not know how you go about to get fit but I do know how you will become wise and that is by prayerfully reading Gods Word (The Bible) everyday. For example, the Catholic One Year Bible may be used year after year, the reader may start on any day of any year and follow the system easily. The One Year Bible is available in the following versions: The Living Bible, the New American Standard Bible, the King James Version, the New Revised Standard Version, and the New International Version.