

**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF**  
**NEW AGE**  
**BELIEFS**

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# YOGA

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- Info at a Glance
- Introduction and Influence
- Yoga and Children
- The Purpose of Yoga
- Innocent Yoga?
- Theory and Practice: Separable?
- The Occult
- Risks and Hazards
- Kundalini Yoga
- Energy Phenomena and Spirit Possession

## 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 Meditation, Shamanism, and 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 health-care 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).

### YOGA AND CHILDREN

Today, yoga is increasingly advocated as a positive practice even for young children, such

as an important adjunct to children's education or gym classes (2232/2243). Unfortunately, if yoga is ultimately an occult practice, such advocacy will not benefit children but will, in all probability, sooner or later harm them spiritually or otherwise (278).

Educator and psychic Deborah Rozman is the author of two books on meditation\* for children, and she names her mentor as occultist Christopher Hills, developer of spirulina and founder of the University of the Trees in Boulder Creek, California (2261:dedication). After noting that puberty supposedly "opens new psychic energies," which result in experiencing psychic phenomena, she observes that classroom meditation helps to speed the process of evolution of the "higher Self." Here, she encourages children to do "physical yoga exercises to quiet and balance the rapidly growing and restless [psychic] energies..." (2261:74-76).

In her chapter "Yoga Exercises for the Young," she explains, "The real purpose of yoga exercises is to put the body in a state where meditation on the One is possible... Physical yoga is called hatha yoga... Hatha yoga is balancing the spiritual and physical and male and female energies (the polarities) in the body" (2261:85). Thus, using yoga exercises from the Hindu spiritist Paramahansa Yogananda, founder of the Self-realization Fellowship, she tells the child, "Use your will and your imagination to direct the [psychic] energy to flow down your whole body into your left foot as you tense the left foot and then relax it" (2261:86). This is also to be done for other areas of the body.

Today there are dozens of books specifically to instruct children on how to do yoga (cf. New Age Education). Among them are Rachael Carr's *Be a Frog, a Bird or a Tree*, and *Wheel, Camel, Fish and Plow: Yoga for You*; Ken Cohen's *Imagine That! A Child's Guide to Yoga*; Baba Hari Dass's *A Child's Garden of Yoga*; Eve Diskin's *Yoga for Children*; Else Klippner's *My Magic Garden*; Suzanne Schreiber's *Yoga for the Fun of It: Hatha Yoga for Pre-School Children*; and Susan N. Terkel's *Yoga Is for Me*.

Yoga is also becoming a popular approach to treatment for children with physical and learning disabilities (2448). Yet even noted New

Age theorist Ken Wilbur admits, "The Path of Yogis can cause severe emotional-sexual upheavals..." (2449:160). As we will see below, yoga is not the safe or neutral practice its proponents claim and, therefore, it should not be used in public schools or advocated for children.

### THE PURPOSE OF YOGA

In this section, we will show that while yoga is a method of physical discipline, it always has distinct spiritual (occult) goals. We will examine the real purpose of yoga, its occult nature, and its physical, mental, and spiritual consequences because we think that people should be told that its alleged "health benefits" carry unforeseen risks. To begin, how is yoga defined? The *Oxford American Dictionary* defines "yoga" in the following manner: "1. a Hindu system of meditation and self-control designed to produce mystical experience and spiritual insight. 2. a system of physical exercises and breathing control" (414:1085).

Most people think of yoga only in terms of the second definition. We will show that this is a mistake. When examining the *true* goal of yoga, one sees why these two definitions ultimately cannot be separated. In other words, the one who practices yoga as "a system of physical exercises and breathing control" is also practicing a system "designed to produce mystical experience and spiritual (occult) insight." For example, Ernest L. Rossi of the Department of Psychology at UCLA states how yoga is designed to induce altered states of consciousness:

If one considers the ancient yoga science of *pranayama* (controlled breathing) to have relevance, then one must admit that the manual manipulation of the nasal cycle during meditation (*dhyana*) is the most thoroughly documented of techniques for altering consciousness. For thousands of years these techniques for the subtle alterations of nasal breathing have been gradually codified into classical texts. Some of these are the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (II, 6-9, 19-20), *Siva Samhita* (III, 24, 25), *Gheranda Samhita* (V, 49-52), and *Yoga Chudamani Upanisad* (V, 98-100)... A new tradition of psychophysiological

and experimental research exploring these ancient techniques has been developing during the past few decades (Hasegawa and Kem, 1978). The work of Vinekar (1966), Rao and Potdar (1970), Eccles (1978), and Funk and Clarke (1980) also provides a broad background of independent studies using Western laboratory methods in studying the relationship of this nasal cycle to the ancient yogic tradition of *pranayama* in achieving psychosomatic health and the transpersonal states of *dhyana* [deep contemplation] and *samadhi* [occult enlightenment] (1046: 113-14).

As we have said, many who recommend yoga claim it is an excellent way in which to loosen one's muscles, keep fit, and maintain health. For these people, yoga is simply physical exercise and nothing more; the practice has little to do with religion. Such persons, however, do not properly understand the nature and purpose of true yoga practice. Yoga is much more than merely an innocent form of relaxing the mind and body. One reason that yoga clearly belongs in the category of religion is because the classic yoga texts reveal that proper yoga practice incorporates many goals of occultism. Allegedly, it will not only result in a "sound" mind and a "healthy" body but also in spiritual (occult) enlightenment.\*

However, a "sound" mind and "healthy" body, as defined in yoga, are different than what most people normally think of. Yoga philosophy teaches that mind and body are ultimately "one." In yoga theory, to influence the body through yoga practice will result in powerfully influencing the mind and spirit as well.

How does yoga theory maintain that the body can dramatically influence the mind and spirit, producing major experiences with altered states of consciousness\* and spiritual enlightenment?\* In yoga theory, the body is really a crude *layer* of one's mind, and both are aspects of the continuum of alleged divine consciousness that is "awakened" by yoga practice. Therefore, manipulation of the body is equivalent to manipulation of the mind and spirit. This is why the *physical* postures of yoga are *designed* to manipulate consciousness toward a specific occult goal. Yogi authority Gopi Krishna comments:

All the systems of yoga . . . are designed to bring about those psychosomatic changes in the body which are essential for the metamorphosis of consciousness. A new [divine] center—presently dormant in the average man and woman—has to be activated and a more powerful stream of psychic energy must [be awakened] (592:15).

Yoga postures and breathing, then, are designed to *awaken* psychic energy and bring about dramatic changes in consciousness.

So what is the final goal of yoga practice and the altered states of consciousness that it generates? The end purpose is for the individual to realize that he or she is one essence with God, or ultimate reality, however this is defined. In other words, one must realize that he or she is God. Whatever school of yoga is used (*hatha, raja, bhakti*, etc.), whether it is Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Sufi, Tantric, or some other religious tradition, the goal is typically the same: occult enlightenment\* achieved by internal manipulation of occult energies\* (*prana, chi*) leading to altered states of consciousness\* in order to produce awareness of one's inherent union with God, or ultimate reality (616).

Swami Rama, an accomplished yogi and founder of the worldwide Himalayan International Institute of Yoga, Science and Philosophy, affirms that "there are many different methods of yoga, all leading to the same goal of Self-Realization" (914:7). He describes this as "the union of man with Absolute Reality" (914:3). Swami Ajaya correctly affirms that "the main teaching of Yoga is that man's true nature is divine" (914:vi).

The physical exercises of yoga, then, are only a means to a much larger goal: attaining godhood. However, where the goal is to introduce yoga as a physical exercise only, this is probably not stated. Thus, some yoga teachers employ yoga *deceptively*. They know exactly what it intends, but hope to "enlighten" people on the sly. Yoga will achieve its own transformation in people, so there is no need to mention its controversial religious—especially occult—aspects. Judith Lasater, Ph.D., in her article "Yoga: An Ancient Technique for Restoring Health" states, on the one hand, that "yoga is widely used as a palliative for various physical problems" (197:37). But she agrees the

*real* goal of yoga is to enable the individual to “perceive his true nature.” The mind and body are *both* aspects of that nature, divine consciousness, and it is yoga which allows people to discover this as their true nature or essence:

One basic assumption of *Yoga Sutras* [a standard yoga text] is that the body and mind are part of one continuum of [divine] existence, the mind merely being more subtle than the body. This is the foundation for the yogic view of health. The interaction of body and mind is the central concern of the entire science. It is believed that as the body and mind are brought into balance and health, the individual will be able to perceive his true [divine] nature; this will allow life to be lived through him more freely and spontaneously (197:36).

In other words, yoga practice supposedly brings “health and balance” to mind and body. But defined properly, this means a developed awareness of one’s own inner divinity and an allowing of one’s divine nature to be “lived out.”

### INNOCENT YOGA?

When Westerners employ yoga techniques as a means to improve their health, they should understand that they can also be producing subtle changes within themselves which will have dramatic spiritual consequences that will not be for the better. Regardless of the school or spiritual tradition, yoga practice tends to alter a person’s consciousness in an occult direction.

Even when yoga is practiced innocently, it can eventually produce dramatic occult transformation. “Personality changes can be brought about in Hatha Yoga by changing the body so that it influences the mind” (188:223). Consider the experience of Christina Grof, who, prior to her experience with yoga, was an average housewife with normal plans for her life. She took up yoga entirely without suspicion as a practice that would help her physically during her pregnancy. After all, there are widespread claims that “during pregnancy, yoga exercises are extremely beneficial and will keep you supple and relaxed” (727:143).

What Christian Grof got was far more. She found herself transformed from a “conservative

suburban housewife” into a New Age leader by means of hatha yoga. All she had to do was “join a hatha yoga class for exercise” and the logical progression ensued:

During the birth of my first child, for which I had prepared with the Lamaze method of breathing (very much like yogic *pranayama*), this enormous spiritual force was released in me. Of course, I didn’t understand it and was given morphine to stop it as soon as the baby was born. . . . Then the same thing happened when my second child was born. This all led to more and more experiences. I threw myself into yoga, although still not acknowledging it as a spiritual tool. My meeting with Swami Muktananda really blew the lid off everything. He served as a catalyst to awaken what I had been resisting, which was kundalini (the universal life force) (589:40).

Thus, an innocently practiced yoga-for-exercise routine led to numerous psychic experiences that had the cumulative impact of dramatically changing her life. She became a disciple of the Hindu guru\* Muktananda and then, as we will see, a leader in the New Age Movement with a specific mission: to assist people who were having “spiritual emergencies” from their occult practices and help them to “properly interpret” and successfully integrate these “divine” experiences into their lives (759).

Initially, however, as the standard *kundalini* yoga symptoms emerged in her life, the prognosis was not good. (Hindu kundalini mythology is discussed later.) Grof herself was in the midst of a spiritual emergency and increasingly convinced of her own insanity. “I was convinced I was headed for a life of psychopathology. I was afraid I was going crazy” (589:41). Nevertheless, counseling through occult philosophy put matters in their “proper” perspective. Her marriage ended, “which it was destined to do anyway.” And the late popular mythologist Joseph Campbell helped her recognize, “The schizophrenic is drowning in the same waters in which the mystic is swimming with delight.” He also referred her to LSD and consciousness researcher Stan Grof for more counseling.

The rest is history. The couple were eventually married and today coordinate some 50 SEN

(Spiritual Emergency Network) regional information centers around the globe (cf. 759:227). They also publish a significant amount of literature in the field of occult metaphysics. Their reinterpretation of the pathological phenomena induced by occult practice—as a positive transforming spirituality (a spiritual “emergence”)—not only helps undergird and legitimize the occult, but it also effectively inhibits discernment of the true issues involved.

For example, in the case of kundalini yoga, symptoms of mental illness and demonization are gratuitously redefined as emerging manifestations of “higher” or divine consciousness. Thus, we are not to question or fear the kundalini process but to surrender to it and trust it implicitly, for it is indeed part of that ageless wisdom of evolutionary transformation which is far wiser than ourselves. A chapter in a recent book edited by Stan and Christina Grof, *Spiritual Emergency*, reveals a basic approach of SEN counseling. The title is “When Insanity Is a Blessing” (759:77-97).

Thus, a slow but sure yoga-induced occult transformation catapulted Christina Grof headlong into the world of occultism. In the long run, her innocent flirtation with yoga altered her entire life and resulted in her becoming a leader in the New Age Movement, with influence over hundreds of thousands of people.

Consider one more example of the potential consequences of innocent yoga practice. While Christian Grof used yoga for help in her pregnancy, Carole, a friend of coauthor John Weldon, used yoga for medical and health reasons. We published her story in *The Coming Darkness: Confronting Occult Deception* (278). We first met Carole as a result of exchanging information on the famous Indian guru and yogi Swami Rama. The following information is taken from material sent to us.

Carole was very sick and doctors were unable to find the cause of her illness. When she went to a physician-nutritionist recommended by a friend, she found some literature in his office about the Himalayan Institute, of which the doctor was a staff member. The institute was founded by Indian Swami Rama, one of the most scientifically studied of the gurus, beginning with famous biofeedback researcher and spiritist

(2763) Dr. Elmer Green. Carole decided to attend the institute, where she began lessons in hatha yoga. Eventually, she was initiated and received her mantra, or word of occult power, from Swami Rama. As he laid his hands upon her head, the typical transfer of “occult energy” began (termed *shaktipat diksha*). Carole was in heaven:

Currents of electrical energy began to permeate my head and went down into my body. . . . It was as if a spell had come over me, the bliss that I felt was as if I had been touched by God. The power that had come from his hand, and simply being in his presence, drew me to him irresistibly.

The night after receiving her mantra, Carole was visited by a spirit being who claimed to be the spirit of Swami Rama himself. Although no one had ever mentioned the spirit world in her church (they did not believe in such things), Carole felt that this was the means of directly communing with God. She experienced wonderful powerful forces and energies, while thoughts entered her mind with a magnetic-like force:

Electrical currents were pulsating around my body and then moved into my hand, the currents were shaking my hand and strong, almost entrancing thoughts were impressed into my mind, “Meditate, meditate. I want to speak with you.” It was a miracle. I was communicating with the spirit world. I had found God. Sitting in the darkness of my living room I began to repeat my mantra. A presence seemed to fill the room. I began to see visions of being one with the universe and the magnetic thoughts were now leaving and I was hearing a voice, which identified itself as Swami Rama, saying he was communicating with me through astral travel.

Within one week, after meditating many hours each day and still in constant communication with this spirit, forces began to come upon me and gave me powers to do yoga postures; I was floating through them, the forces giving me added breath even . . . postures that before would be very painful to do.

However, after two weeks of daily yoga meditation, Carole became engulfed in a nightmare of utter dread and terror. Voices that once claimed

they were angelic turned threatening, even demonic. She was brutally assaulted, both physically and spiritually by spirits. During meditation, in the midst of being violently shaken, she could sense that the same energy received at initiation, energy which was now felt to be *personal*, was attempting to remove her life-essence from her physical body—in her words, “to literally pull the life from my shell of a body.” She sensed an overwhelming and implacable hatred directed toward her from this “energy,” as if “monstrosities of another world were trying to take my very soul from me, inflicting pain beyond endurance, ripping and tearing into the very depths of my being.”

The intermittent suffocation and torment seemed interminable; her fears increased as she realized there was no one to help her. Finally, the attack subsided. But it was merely the first of many.

It seems that nothing could stop the assaults. Her agonized pleas to the spirits were ignored; her husband was powerless. Her father wanted her to see a psychiatrist; others also doubted her sanity. In desperation, her mother contacted psychic friends from a local church of the Unity School of Christianity. They laid hands on Carole and commanded that “the divinity within” deliver her, but to no avail.

Dr. C. Norman Shealy, M.D., Ph.D., entered the picture. He is a noted neurosurgeon, a former professor at Harvard University, past president of the American Holistic Medical Association, and the author of *Occult Medicine Can Save Your Life*. Dr. Shealy also works in conjunction with psychics and spiritists such as Caroline Myss. When Dr. Shealy was unable to help, he referred Carole to Dr. Robert Leichtman, M.D., a spiritist who is coauthor of several dozen books received by revelation from the spirits.

Leichtman admitted that Carole’s situation was not uncommon among followers of Eastern gurus.\* He even told her some have died as a result of similar psychic attacks. But he, too, was unable to help. His instructions, such as visualizing herself in the white “Christ light” of protection, were useless. By this time, Carole was near the end:

I had to endure the torture, unable to free myself. To those around me I was insane. No one believed

me and no one could free me. The hopelessness I felt was unbearable. No one believed me except the psychics . . . and they could do nothing.

I was defenseless against these never-ending attacks . . . hundreds of presences filling my room, which itself would be filled with thick, ice cold air, my body drenched with perspiration as my whole being fought against them.

After spending several weeks at my parents’ we decided perhaps I could try returning home. But that night the spirits started to exert their full power.

First, against my skull. I felt as if they were trying to crack it open, like the air was being cut off to my brain. Incredible pressure was exerted upon my back and chest, pulling with a wrench-like grip. It felt like they were trying to pull my shoulder from its socket, pressing on my eyes trying to blind me, pushing on my throat trying to choke me. Filled with fear and exhaustion, on the brink of death I screamed to my husband, “I’m dying; I can’t take it anymore. Get me to the hospital.”

I was taken to the hospital where I laid like a scared dog cowering on a cart. I could hardly speak but at least the spirits were gone—temporarily. . . . The doctor on duty recommended a psychiatrist who saw me the next morning. He told me I was covering up some deep problems with this “talk of evil spirits.” “There is no such thing as the devil,” he said coldly.

Carole admitted herself to the hospital, but once more no one could help. The attacks finally subsided and she was released. Upon returning home, the attacks began again. More unimaginable torment. Although she was terrified of dying, death was now her desire. Wishing to take her life but too fearful of dying, she readmitted herself to the hospital. Once again, she was placed in a locked ward. She felt that here she would die, alone and in torment.

But today, Carole is alive and well. Even her psychiatrist is amazed at the miraculous transformation. She is now in perfect health, both mentally and physically.

How did Carole get free? No one had been able to help her. Today, Carole attributes both her health and her life to a living Jesus Christ who

delivered her from a desperate plight. Reflecting back on her predicament, she is awed that such terrible destruction could be purchased at the price of a simple, supposedly harmless form of yoga meditation.

Events like these reveal that there is more to yoga than meets the eye. Whether yoga can trigger some unknown psychospiritual, physiological response, or whether changes are produced spir- itistically, or both, few can deny yoga is a powerful spiritual discipline that has been used for millen- nia to secure occult, pagan goals. As we proceed, we will better understand the reasons for this.

#### THEORY AND PRACTICE: SEPARABLE?

The basic premise of yoga theory is the funda- mental unity of all existence: God, man, and all of creation are ultimately one divine reality. An editorial in the *Yoga Journal* declares this basic premise:

We are all aware that yoga means "union" and that the practice of yoga unites body, breath, and mind, lower and higher energy centers and, ulti- mately self and God, or higher Self. But more broadly, yoga directs our attention to the unity or oneness that underlies our fragmented experi- ences and equally fragmented world. Family, friends, the Druze guerrilla in Lebanon, the great whale migrating north—all share the same essential [divine] nature (594:4).

This is why physical yoga and Eastern philoso- phy are mutually interdependent; ultimately, you cannot have one without the other. David Fetcho, a researcher with an extensive background in yoga theory and practice, states:

Physical yoga, according to its classical defini- tions, is inheritably and functionally incapable of being separated from Eastern religious meta- physics. The Western practitioner who attempts to do so is operating in ignorance and danger, from the yogi's viewpoint, as well as from the Christian's (725:2).

One of the leading contemporary authorities on kundalini yoga is Gopi Krishna. In his article

"The True Aim of Yoga," he says: "The aim of yoga, then, is to achieve the state of unity or oneness with God, Brahman, [and] spiritual beings . . ." (592:14).

Yoga authorities Feuerstein and Miller com- ment that the postures (*asana*) of yoga and its breathing techniques (*pranayama*) are much more than just physical exercises:

Again, we see that the control of the vital energy (*prana*) by way of breathing, like also *asana*, is not merely a physical exercise, but is accompa- nied by certain psychomental phenomena. In other words, all techniques falling under the heading of *asana* and *pranayama* as, for ex- ample, the *mudras* and *bandhas* [physical posi- tions or symbolic bodily gestures utilizing *pranayama* and concentration for physical or spiritual purposes] of Hathayoga, are *psychoso- matic* exercises. This point, unfortunately, is lit- tle understood by Western practitioners . . . (593:27-28).

Actually, yoga practice is *intended* to validate occult yoga theory. And as noted, yoga theory teaches that everything is, in its true inner nature, divine—not only divine but ultimately equal to everything else—everything from God and the devil to the athlete and the AIDS virus.

Yoga theory also teaches that in their outer nature, everything is *maya*, or illusion. For ex- ample, only in his inner spirit is man divine; his "outer nature," of body and personality, are ulti- mately a delusion that separates him from aware- ness of his real inner divinity. Thus, another purpose of yoga must be to slowly dismantle the outer personality—man's illusory part—so the supposed impersonal divinity can progressively "emerge" from within his hidden divine consciousness (see Eastern Gurus\*).

This is why people who practice yoga only for physical or mental health reasons are ulti- mately the victims of a confidence game. *They* are promised better health; little do they suspect the end goal of yoga is to destroy *them* as indi- viduals. As yoga authorities Feuerstein and Miller comment, yoga results in "a progressive dismantling of human personality ending in a complete abolition. With every step (*anga*) of Yoga, what we call 'man' is demolished a little more" (593:8).

In "Yoga as Methods of Liberation," Moti Lal Pandit observes that (as in Buddhism) "the aim of yoga is to realize liberation from the human condition. To achieve this liberation, various psychological, physical, mental, and mystical methods have been devised. All those methods are anti-social (sometimes even antihuman) in that yoga prescribes a way of life which says: this mortal life is not worth living" (595:41)

Yoga is, after all, a *religious* practice seeking to produce "union" with an impersonal ultimate reality, such as Brahman or Nirvana. If ultimate reality is impersonal, of what final value is one's own personality? For a person to achieve true "union" with Brahman, his "false" self must be destroyed and replaced with awareness of his true divine nature. That is the specific goal of yoga (again, see Eastern Gurus for examples). If we examine yoga theory in more detail, it is easier to understand why yoga practice has such specific occult goals.

One of the most authoritative texts on yoga theory within the Hindu perspective is Pantajali's text on raja Yoga titled *Yoga Sutras* (e.g., 596). In this text, he puts forth the traditional eight "limbs," or parts, of yoga. These are defined within the context of a basic Hindu worldview (reincarnation, *karma*, and *moksha*, or liberation) and intended to support and reinforce Hindu beliefs. Each "limb" has a spiritual goal and together they form a unit. These eight limbs are:

1. *Yama* (self-control, restraint, devotion to the gods [e.g., Krishna] or the final impersonal God [e.g., Brahman])
2. *Niyama* (religious duties, prohibitions, observances)
3. *Asana* (proper postures for yoga practices; these represent the first stage in the isolation of consciousness and are vital components for "transcending the human condition"; 601:54)
4. *Pranayama* (the control and directing of the breath and the alleged divine energy within the human body [prana] to promote health and spiritual [occult] consciousness and evolution)
5. *Pratyahara* (sensory control or deprivation, i.e., withdrawal of the senses from attachment to external objects)

6. *Dharana* (deeper concentration, or mind control)

7. *Dhyana* (deep contemplation from occult meditation)

8. *Samadhi* (occult enlightenment or "God [Brahman] realization" i.e., "union" of the "individual" with God).

Because the eight steps are interdependent, the steps of "postures" and "breathing" cannot logically be separated from the others. Thus, the interdependence of all eight steps reveals why the physical exercises of yoga are *designed* to prepare the body for the spiritual (occult) changes that will allegedly help one realize godhood status.

The concept of *prana* ("breath") is a key to the process. *Pranayama* refers to the knowledge and control of *prana*, or mystical energy, not merely to the control of one's physical breath (979:592). *Prana* is believed to be universal divine energy residing behind the material world (*akasa*). Prana is said to have five forms, and all energy is thought to be a manifestation of it. Swami Nikhilananda describes it in his *Vivekananda—The Yogas and Other Works* as "the infinite, omnipresent manifesting power of this universe" (979:592). Perfect control of *prana* makes one God. One can have "infinite knowledge, infinite power, now":

What power on earth would not be his? He would be able to move the sun and stars out of their places, to control everything in the universe from the atoms to the biggest suns. This is the end and aim of pranayama. When the yogi becomes perfect there will be nothing in nature not under his control. If he orders the gods or the souls of the departed to come, they will come at his bidding. All the forces of nature will obey him as slaves. . . . He who has controlled prana has controlled his own mind and all the minds . . . and all the bodies that exist . . . (979:592-93).

The aim of *pranayama* is also to arouse the coiled-up power in the *muladhara* chakra called *kundalini*:

Then the whole of nature will begin to change and the door of [psychic] knowledge will open. No more will you need to go to books for knowledge; your own mind will have become your book, containing infinite knowledge (979:605).

According to Vivekananda, all occult manifestations are accomplished through yogic control of *prana*:

We see in every country sects that attempted the control of prana. In this country there are mind-healers, spiritualists, Christian Scientists, hypnotists, and so on. If we examine these different sects, we shall find at the back of each is the control of prana, whether they know it or not. If you boil all the theories down, the residuum will be that. It is one and the same force they are manipulating. . . . Thus we see that pranayama includes all that is true even of spiritualism. Similarly, you will find that wherever any sect or body of people is trying to discover anything occult, mysterious, or hidden, they are really practicing some sort of yoga to control their prana. You will find that wherever there is any extraordinary display of power, it is the manifestation of prana (979:593,599).

In other words, *prana*, God, and occult energy are all one and the same. The one who practices yogic breathing (*pranayama*) is by definition attempting to manipulate occult ("divine") energy.

Consider a final statement as to why yoga practice and theory are inseparable. The Spiritual Counterfeits Project in Berkeley, California, publishes a relatively brief treatment on yoga, which we reproduce here with permission. The author was a former practitioner of yoga for several years with the Ananda Marga Yoga Society (726:31-36):

Yoga exercises are taught as part of YMCA physical education programs, as health spa esoterica, on educational TV, and are incorporated into institutional church youth activities—all on the assumption that these techniques are nothing more than a superior brand of physical conditioning.

Yet this assumption is really the worst presumption. . . . [E]ven physical yoga is inextricably bound up in the whole of Eastern religious metaphysics. In fact, it is quite accurate to say that physical yoga and Indian metaphysics are mutually interdependent; you really can't have one without the other. This point may be illustrated by referring to the two major traditional occurrences of physical yoga in the East.

First of all, yoga postures (*asanas*) evolved as an integral part of Raja (royal) Yoga, also known as

*ashtanga* (eight-limbed) yoga. Raja Yoga is one of the more highly sophisticated systems of psychospiritual conditioning, and all the more so because it recognizes the profound influence of the body upon consciousness. (Indeed, its philosophical premise is that the body is but a crude layer of mind.) *Asana* (physical postures) is indispensable as one of the eight stages of Raja Yoga because the yoga postures are themselves specifically designed to manipulate consciousness, to a greater or lesser degree, into Raja Yoga's consummate experience of *samadhi*: undifferentiated union with the primal essence of consciousness, the monist's equivalent of 'God.' In his definitive work on Raja Yoga, Swami Vivekananda writes of *asana*: "A series of exercises, physical and mental, is to be gone through every day until certain higher states are reached. Nerve currents will have to be displaced and given a new channel. New sorts of vibrations will begin: the whole constitution will be remodeled, as it were."

In the context of Raja Yoga, then, the effects of the practice of *asana* are recognized as certainly going far beyond the merely physical and psychological results of Western systems of exercise. But does it necessarily follow that the Westerner practicing physical yoga will automatically have his or her consciousness manipulated into that experience of reality characteristic of Eastern metaphysics? Such a question has a great many ramifications. Some preliminary light may be shed on it, however, by examining the second major occurrence of physical yoga in the East—Hatha Yoga.

Because of widespread abuse in India, Hatha Yoga has there fallen into much disrepute, being considered a gross physical practice without spiritual value. Vivekananda, in comparing *asana* to *hatha*, summarily dismisses the latter as having no real worth at all: "This portion of yoga (*asana*) is a little similar to Hatha Yoga, which deals entirely with the physical body, its aim being to make the physical body very strong. We have nothing to do with it here, because its practices are very difficult. . . and, after all, do not lead to much spiritual growth."

It is this reputation, as well as the ready availability of certain teachers of *hatha* who would perpetuate it, which makes it easy for a Westerner to presume to use the techniques of yoga as but another form of physical self-culture. But, in reality, neither Vivekananda's partisan

snobbery nor a lotus-cart full of Hatha gymnasts can mask the fact that Hatha is classically understood in much the same way as Raja Yoga.

In fact, the classic esoteric handbook of Hatha, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* by Swami Svāt-marama states emphatically in the second and third slokas: "Having thus solemnly saluted his master, Yogi Svāt-marama now presents Hatha Vidya (vidya = wisdom) solely and exclusively for the attainment of Raja Yoga. For those who wander in the darkness of conflicting creeds, unable to reach to the heights of Raja Yoga, the merciful Yogi Svāt-marama has lit the torch of Hatha wisdom."

The meaning here could not be more plain. The techniques of Hatha are given so as to prepare a person's consciousness for the subtler metaphysics of Raja Yoga. Irrespective of belief, Hatha is regarded as a torch to experientially guide one out from that belief into the "wisdom" of Raja Yoga.

Alain Danielou, a recognized French scholar on the subject of yoga, states that "the sole purpose of the physical practices of Hatha Yoga is to suppress physical obstacles on the Spiritual or Royal path of Raja Yoga and Hatha yoga is therefore called 'the ladder to Raja Yoga.'" However for those who practice Hatha for purely physical ends, outside of a total context of spiritual discipline, most of the classic commentaries issue dire warnings. The Ananda Marga Yoga Society's manual for teachers sums them up well: "Indeed from the practice of Hatha Yoga, without a proper effort to the mind, mental and spiritual degeneration may ultimately occur."

The typical middle-class Westerner, taking yoga classes at the YMCA, has little or no idea of the how's and why's of yoga's seeming efficacy. In the traditional understanding, physical yoga has a great deal more to do with the practitioner's invisible, "subtle" body, than it does with the flesh and bones and muscles which encase it. While yoga does purport to first of all work on the muscular, glandular, and physical nervous systems, its real import, as Danielou says, is as "a process of control of the gross body which aims at freeing the subtle body." This subtle body is extremely complex, but can be superficially described as consisting of 72,000 invisible psychic channels called *nadis*, which constitute an other dimensional body which directly corresponds to the physical, or gross, body. The

subtle body is connected to the gross body at several points, with the seven predominant ones located at distinct points ranging from the base of the spine to the top of the head. These are called *chakras*, and they are believed to control the various aspects of the consciousness of the individual. Physical yoga finds its most refined expression when it teaches postures which bring various channels within the subtle body into a specific alignment with one another and thus alter the consciousness of the practitioner in a specified way.

Whether or not this sort of thing is actually going on... it is important to understand that physical yoga, according to its classical definitions, is inherently and functionally incapable of being separated from Eastern religious metaphysics. The Western practitioner who attempts to do so is operating in ignorance and danger, from the yogi's viewpoint, as well as from the Christian's (725:2-6).

## THE OCCULT

The previous statement reveals that the physical practice of yoga is designed to alter one's consciousness and bring occult transformation. Thus, authoritative texts on both yoga and the occult reveal that yoga is a potentially profound occult practice (596:132-37,295-399/597:112-13/598:2-3, chs. 17-19,26-27/386:29,98/435:50-51). Yoga is designed to awaken occult energies in the body, to lead to occult transformation, and to secure specific occult goals. Certain experiences under yoga (especially kundalini yoga) are similar to those found in shaman initiation and ritualistic magic, including experiences of spirit possession and insanity. Virtually all standard yoga texts acknowledge that yoga practice develops psychic powers and other occult abilities.

All this is why the yoga scholar and Sanskrit authority Rammurti Mishra can interpret yoga theory as laying the foundation for occultism. "In conclusion, it may be said that behind every psychic investigation, behind mysticism, occultism, etc., knowingly or unknowingly, the Yoga system is present" (596:138).

In his article "Kundalini and the Occult," occult authority John White observes that the essence of occultism is the attempt to gain

“higher” knowledge and power or control of the forces of nature, especially the “life energy” (*prana*) which underlies the basis of true magic and psychic phenomena. “In its highest form, occult science merges indistinguishably with true mysticism. . . . [M]ysticism and genuine occultism are closely allied. . . . [T]he heart of genuine occult practices appear to be synonymous with aspects of the [yogic] kundalini concept . . .” (607:363-64). Yoga authority Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon), author of a standard text on kundalini yoga, *The Serpent Power*, agrees, and he supplies many additional reasons why yoga and occult magic go hand in hand (see 599:186-204).

Until his death, perhaps the leading authority on shamanism and comparative religion was Mircea Eliade. Note his observations of the similarities between yoga and witchcraft: “All features associated with European witches are . . . claimed also by Indo-Tibetan yogis and magicians.” Along with a range of occult powers common to both, some yogis:

. . . boast that they break all the religious taboos and social rules: that they practice human sacrifice, cannibalism, and all manner of orgies, including incestuous intercourse, and that they eat excrement, nauseating animals, and devour human corpses. In other words, they proudly claim all the crimes and horrible ceremonies cited *ad nauseam* in the Western European witch trials (564:71).

Because yoga is an occult system, the physical, mental, and spiritual dangers that accompany occult practices are also found in yoga (see 278). Thus, even standard yoga books warn of the serious dangers arising from supposedly “wrong” yoga practice. But we think such hazards are conceded because yoga is an *occult* practice, *not* because its techniques are allegedly done incorrectly.

### RISKS AND HAZARDS

The following citations taken from authoritative texts show many risk and hazards of yoga practice (including death).

Shree Purohit Swami’s commentary on Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* warns, “People forget that *Yama* and *Niyama* [limbs one and two] form the foundation [of yoga practice], and unless it is firmly laid, they should not practice postures and breathing exercises. In India and Europe, I came across some three hundred people who suffered permanently from wrong practices, the doctors on examination found there was nothing organically wrong and consequently could not prescribe” (600:56-57).

Because most people (including most medical doctors) wrongly assume that yoga is harmless, they rarely consider its possible relevance to any illnesses of their patients who practice yoga. But we are convinced that many perplexing diseases, including some deaths, are related to yoga. Richard Kieninger, a New Age educator, recalls, “A woman of my acquaintance upset her hormonal balance doing this yoga exercise, and it produced a malfunction in her adrenal glands. Doctors didn’t know how to reverse the effects . . . and she soon died. . . . Swami Rama warns that advanced forms of patterned breathing, which is a common yoga exercise, can cause a person to harm himself irreparably” (588:71).

United Nations spiritual adviser and spiritist Sri Chinmoy (810:53-68,87-89/811:9-20,26-33), author of *Yoga and the Spiritual Life* (617), admits, “To practice pranayama [breath control] without real guidance is very dangerous. I know of three persons who have died from it . . .” (618:8).

In *Yoga and Mysticism*, Swami Prabhavananda warns about the dangers of the yoga breathing exercises, which so many today think are harmless, when he writes:

Now we come to breathing exercises. Let me caution you: they can be very dangerous. Unless properly done, there is a good chance of injuring the brain. And those who practice such breathing without proper supervision can suffer a disease which no known science or doctor can cure. It is impossible, even for a medical person, to diagnose such an illness. . . . [For example,] I had known a young boy of perhaps 16 or 17 years of age who had begun to practice hatha yoga. . . . He was acting very strangely. He would prostrate fully on the ground, rise to full height, then

repeat the performance—over and over again. The Swami said that he had lost his mind. . . . Finally, however he became so unmanageable that he had to be confined. . . . As regards breathing exercises, I know that Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and all the disciples of Ramakrishna have warned us again not to practice them (604:18-19; yet Vivekenanda, Ramakrishna's disciple, encouraged them! 979:592-99).

Yoga authority Hans Ulrich Rieker admonishes in *The Yoga of Light*, "Yoga is not a trifling jest if we consider that any misunderstanding in the practice of yoga can mean death and insanity," and of *kundalini* yoga, he says that if the breath is "prematurely exhausted [withdrawn] there is immediate danger of death for the yogi" (603:9,134).

The practice of hatha yoga is often conceded to be dangerous. Gopi Krishna warns of the possible dangers of such practice, including "drastic effects" on the central nervous system and the possibility of death:

In Hatha yoga the breathing exercises are more strenuous, attended by some abnormal positions of the chin, the diaphragm, the tongue, and other parts of the body to prevent expulsion or inhalation of air into the lungs in order to induce a state of suspended breathing. This can have drastic effects on the nervous system and the brain, and it is obvious that such a discipline can be very dangerous. Even in India, only those prepared to face death dare to undergo the extreme discipline of Hatha yoga (592:13).

A standard authority on hatha yoga, *The Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (chapter 2, verse 15), warns, "Just as lions, elephants, and tigers are tamed, so the prana, should be kept under control. Otherwise it can kill the practitioner" (603:79).

As was mentioned earlier, so-called hatha yoga is not easily distinguished from other forms of yoga. And the same problems encountered in hatha yoga are encountered in almost all forms of yoga. Yoga authority Ernest Wood emphasizes, "I hold that all *Hatha* Yogas are extremely dangerous," and he therefore urges use of a "different" form of yoga, *Raja* Yoga (597:79). But another

authority on yoga, Hans Ulrich Rieker, claims, "Mastery of hatha yoga is *only a preliminary* to the mastery of raja yoga" (603:128, emphasis added). Furthermore, a standard work, the *Shiva Samhita*, argues, "There is no Hatha Yoga without Raja Yoga and no Raja Yoga without Hatha; therefore, the Yogi should start with Hatha Yoga, guided by a competent teacher" (597:77).

What this implies is that yoga is yoga; its various forms do not fundamentally alter its basic nature. For example, the Hindu holy book, the *Bhagavad Gita*, promotes at least five different systems of yoga, and yet all are acknowledged as potentially dangerous. Thus, Hindu master Sri Krishna Prem cautions in *The Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita*, "As stated before nothing but dangerous, mediumistic psychisms or neurotic dissociations of personality can result from the practice of [yoga] meditation without the qualifications mentioned at the end of the last chapter" (612:47). He warns, "To practice it, as many do, out of curiosity . . . is a mistake which is punished with futility, neurosis, or worse [even insanity itself]" (602:XV,46).

The specific physical and mental consequences arising from yoga practice are also listed in other authoritative yoga texts. Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon) refers to "considerable pain, physical disorder, and even disease . . ." (599:12). Rieker lists cancer of the throat, all sorts of ailments, blackouts, strange trance states, or insanity from even "the slightest mistake . . ." (603:30,79,96,111-12).

In *The Seven Schools of Yoga*, Ernest Wood warns of "the imminent risk of most serious bodily disorder, disease, and even madness" (597:14). He observes that many people have brought upon themselves incurable illnesses or insanity by neglecting Hatha Yoga prerequisites, and "by any mistake there arises cough, asthma, head, eye, and ear pains, and many other diseases" (597:78).

From the above, we conclude that innumerable yoga teachers in the West are being irresponsible in promoting yoga as a safe physical regimen.

However, no discussion of yoga is complete without an evaluation of "kundalini yoga." By name, this is now practiced by tens of thousands of Americans, including many professing Christians in mainline churches.

## KUNDALINI YOGA

As mentioned earlier, *Spiritual Emergency* is one book that seeks to help people integrate pathological occult experience as a positive form of spiritual "emergence." It was edited by Stan and Christina Grof, who say "Kundalini awakening is becoming one of their most frequently encountered forms of spiritual emergency" (759:101). They noted that an analysis of the last 501 calls and 117 letters to their Menlo Park, California, office of SEN "revealed that a 'typical caller' was a forty-year-old female (69 percent) experiencing some form of kundalini awakening (24 percent)" (759:227).

In Hindu mythology and occult anatomy, the goddess Kundalini is thought of as a female serpent lying dormant at the base of the spine. Arthur Avalon comments that "kundalini is the Divine Cosmic Energy in bodies" (599:1). She represents the female half of the divine polarity in man. While lying at the base of the spine, she is separated from Shiva, her divine "lover" and masculine counterpart, who resides in the brain. When aroused by yoga practices, she uncoils, travels up the spine toward her lover, opening the alleged psychic centers called *chakras* in the process. When the crown or top *chakra* is reached, the union of Shiva/Shakti occurs, supposedly leading the practitioner to divine enlightenment\* and union with Brahman. "Traditionally she is known as Durga the creatrix, Chandi the fierce and bloodthirsty, and Kali the destroyer. She is also Bhajangi the serpent. As Chandi or Kali she has a garland of skulls around her neck and drinks human blood" (491:13).

Kundalini arousal is not, as commonly thought, restricted to *hatha* yoga practice. Even yoga authorities have said that all yoga is ultimately kundalini yoga and that yoga is meaningless without it. This is why no less an authority than Hans Rieker concludes, "Kundalini [is] the mainstay of *all* yoga practices" (603:101, emphasis added).

Kundalini arousal or its equivalent is found not only in yoga; it is also encountered in scores of the new religions, many occult practices, and in some practices of New Age medicine.\* Indeed, we have found no less than 15 different New Age health techniques in which proponents claim

that their methods may arouse kundalini. For example, certain body work programs such as the Alexander method may arouse kundalini (cf. Martial Arts).

In our study of 70 new religions, we found kundalini arousal, or something similar, in roughly 50 percent of them, particularly the mystical, New Age, occult religions (716). For example, Hindu and Buddhist gurus,\* who account for scores of the new religions, are typically possessed by spirits. They often describe themselves in that manner, although they refer to it as a "divinizing"—not a demonizing—process (see below). But when describing their spirit, or "energy," possession, it is often directly linked to kundalini activity. This includes the experiences of Muktananda, Rajneesh, Rudrananda, Gopi Krishna, Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo, Vivekananda, Da Free John, and many others (610:1-2500); see Meditation). Whether it is called "supramental consciousness," "god-possession," "divine companionship," or some other euphemism, the reality is the same. Consciousness researcher John White concludes:

Although the word kundalini comes from the yogic tradition, nearly all the world's major religions, spiritual paths, and genuine occult traditions see something akin to the kundalini experience as having significance in "divinizing" a person. The word itself may not appear in the traditions, but the concept is there nevertheless, wearing a different name yet recognizable as a key to attaining godlike stature (608:17).

For example, note the following account as cited by Richard Katz. Dr. Katz was personally involved with the Kalahari !Kung tribe and is the author of *Boiling Energy*, a book-length treatment on the tribe. He received his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Harvard, where he currently teaches and is active in the field of Community Mental Health. In "Education for Transcendence: Lessons from the !Kung Zhin/Twasi" he writes of the occult energy that the !Kung tribe calls "n/um" (the exclamation and slash represent a "click" sound) which is activated by a trance state called "!Kia." And he describes how the tribe is socialized to accept the experience of it. We have here, as in the Bubba (Da) Free John spiritual com-

munity described elsewhere (see Meditation), socially legitimized mass demonization. Note the clearly shamanistic\* and kundalini motifs:

The Zhu/twasi say that !kia is due to the activation of an energy, which they call n/um, or medicine. Those who have learned to !kia are said to possess n/um and are called "masters of n/um" or "n/um masters." N/um resides in the pit of the stomach. As the n/um master continues his energetic dance becoming warm and sweating profusely, the n/um heats up and becomes a vapor. It then rises up the spine, to a point approximately at the base of the skull, at which time !kia results. . . . The action and ascent of n/um is described by Tsau: "in your backbone you feel a pointed something, and it works its way up. Then the base of your spine is tingling . . . and then it makes your thoughts nothing in your head."

This n/um is an energy which is held in awe and considered to be very powerful and mysterious. It is this same n/um that the n/um master "puts into" somebody in attempting to cure him. . . . Through !kia, the Zhu/twasi participates in the religious dimension. Transcending himself, he is able to contact the supernatural, a realm where the ghosts of dead ancestors live. . . . Masters of n/um may struggle with the ghosts and may often win. . . . Socialization for !kia and seeking !kia are preparatory phases in education for !kia itself. There is consensual agreement and clarity about the concept of !kia and the action of n/um. . . . At its core, the education is a process of *accepting !kia experience for oneself*.

This is especially difficult because !kia is painful as well as unknown; it is a greatly feared experience. . . . In describing the onset of !kia, medicine men refer again and again to pain and fear. They describe searing pain in the area of the diaphragm and spleen, and at the pit of the stomach. A master of n/um recalling his first experience with n/um says: 'N/um got into my stomach. It was hot and painful, like fire, I was surprised and I cried.' . . . [A]s a person enters !kia the fear is that not only will he lose himself, but he may never come back. . . . One of the older n/um masters describes this death and rebirth: "(In !kia) your heart stops, you're dead, your thoughts are nothing, you breathe with difficulty. You see things, n/um things; you see ghosts killing people, you smell burning, rotten flesh; then you cure, you pull sickness out. You cure,

cure, cure, cure . . . then you live. Then your eyeballs clear and then you see people clearly." . . .

Though originally from the gods, n/um now passes regularly from man to man. Teaching is primarily by example. The teacher has been there before. He may !kia at that particular time; certainly he has had !kia many times before. He recognizes the student's progress, interprets his condition, and confirms that the student is in !kia. . . . The teacher is a spiritual guide in that he initiates the student into the cultural mysteries, probing the nature of his existence. He is like a priest in that he has had contact with the ghosts and can guide the student to that realm. He's very much a therapist in that he tries to help the student accept his fear rather than be overcome by it. And, he has been an academic teacher because he has taught the student the conceptual framework of !kia (899:140-44,148).

Thus, whether in the Eastern guru's\* transmission of occult power termed *shaktipat* (see Meditation), the !Kung's !kia/n/um, classical shamanism,\* kundalini, or similar phenomena in other traditions, one is dealing with basic occult energy. In the case of the !Kung tribe, it is attributed directly to the spirits, in the case of Muktananda, Bubba (Da) Free John, and other gurus, it may or may not be directly attributed to the spirits, but the spiritistic associations and manifestations are so pervasive one would be hard-pressed to deny them.

Kundalini arousal typically results in temporary states of insanity, radical changes in the physical body, and possession by a spirit (491:14,33,37; cf. 236). In *The Primal Power in Man or the Kundalini Shakti* (894), Swami Narayananda describes some of the "exciting" possibilities:

These hot currents that reach the brain center heat the brain, make the mind fickle, bring insomnia, brain disorder, insanity and incurable diseases. For the hot currents keep the mind wide awake and if a person does not know how to check the currents and to bring down the partly risen kundalini shakti to safer centers, one suffers terribly and it may ruin the whole life of a person or lead one to insanity. This is why we see many become insane, many get brain defects, and many others get some incurable diseases after deep sorrow (895:356).

Gopi Krishna, founder of one of the many kundalini research centers throughout the world, records his own experience:

It was variable for many years, painful, obsessive, even fantasmic. I have passed through almost all the stages of different mediumistic, psychotic, and other types of mind; for some time I was hovering between sanity and insanity.

I was writing in many languages, some of which I never knew [the occult ability of automatic writing] (491:124; cf. pp. 14,33,37).

Krishna believes that most schizophrenics and manic depressives represent "malfunctioning" kundalini energy, thus noting the ease with which it produces mental derangement. When referring to his encounters with individuals who went mad, he says that it is widely known in India that hatha yoga practices can lead to insanity (491:14,33,37):

The power, when aroused in a body not attuned to it with the help of various [yoga] disciplines or not genetically mature for it, can lead to awful mental states, to almost every form of mental disorder, from hardly noticeable aberrations to the most horrible forms of insanity, to neurotic and paranoid states, to megalomania . . . (491:14).

In spite of the admitted hazards of kundalini practice, many churchgoers in mainline liberal denominations are seemingly willing to experiment with it. Having received little or no discernment on occult issues from their liberal churches, they may find themselves open to experimentation in practices or traditions that claim to offer spiritual power, enlightenment,\* and union with "God." Professing Christian Mineda J. McCleave is familiar with this. She became interested in the occult and, despite God's warnings against all such involvement (Deuteronomy 18:9-12), she naively trusted that God would protect her from anything evil (890:401). After immersing herself in occult literature, she began meditation.\* The result was kundalini arousal, ten years of serious mental problems, and a thorough conversion to Christian mysticism. In the end, McCleave interpreted

her occult kundalini experience as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Her story provides a powerful look at the consequences of occult practice in contemporary American spiritual life:

I plunged into meditative prayer. . . . I began to have problems relating to the world around me. I had shifts in consciousness during my non-meditative hours. . . . I was again bothered with alternating periods of euphoria, anxiety, depression, and, sometimes, despair. I was surprised to find that my peaceful prayer life was often counterbalanced with thoughts of suicide. I could not understand these strange moods. . . . This activity, added to long periods of prayer, was causing *changes*, painful ones, in my mind and body. The physical, mental, and emotional problems that surfaced were so dramatic that I had to quit working.

I withdrew from society and had to rely upon my family to care for and support me. . . . I had begun a long "dark night of the soul," and it lasted for ten years. My peaceful prayers changed to frantic spiritual cries for help. . . . Finally, in 1975, when I was thirty-seven years old, I was hospitalized three times in the psychiatric ward of the local hospital. . . . I could no longer cope with my agitated mind. I was besieged with migraine headaches and no longer had any control over my life.

Reluctantly, I endured eight months of therapy. . . . On April 6, 1976 . . . I was jarred out of my prayer by what felt like a current of energy that seemed to enter my body through my left foot. . . . This current was constant for four days and nights. With it there was an increased feeling of great body heat. I felt as though I were burning up from the inside out. Relatives could feel heat emanating from the front and back of my head while their hands were an inch away from me. It was a frightening experience. I knew, intuitively, that I had somehow triggered this current through intense prayer, but I had no knowledge of how to stop it.

My mind was *hyperhyperactive*. . . . Physically, I went through a variety of symptoms. . . . Emotionally, I went up and down the keyboard of euphoria, joy, bewilderment, anxiety, depression, and the familiar despair. I was, at times, deluded and often disoriented. On one occasion, I actually believed I had died. Such peace! I was almost disappointed to realize I hadn't. I was afraid to leave

my apartment for fear someone would notice my schizophrenic-like behavior. I gazed into a mirror and observed a "wild" look—the same strange look I had noticed in 1973 after I took a week of biofeedback training. . . . Despite my discomfort, I believed that what was happening to me was *good*, regardless of contrary appearances. I believed, "All things work together for good to them that love God." Yet, while trying to adjust to this marvelous energy that was coursing through my mind and body, now intermittently, I exhibited so many psychiatric symptoms that the psychologist could no longer work with me. . . .

Finally, in December 1976, by the grace of God, I was led to an open-minded, tolerant, compassionate, caring Christian psychiatrist, Bill Grimmer—an extraordinary man. He was not *afraid* of the occult. He was not *afraid* of kundalini. . . . My psychiatrist helped me to remember that I am still a Christian, not a yogi. He encouraged me to continue in my search—to reread the Scriptures and the writing of the mystics—to find the common denominator. . . .

As I reread the Scriptures and the writings of the mystics, I was amazed at the new insights I gained. . . . The accomplished yogis explained their attainments in terms of kundalini. The Christian mystics, unaware of the Hindu term, described the same phenomenon, but named the animating, motivating spiritual force at work within them as the Holy Spirit. . . . The Christian experience [of kundalini] is described as the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" (890:403-07).

According to the Bible, however, receiving the Holy Spirit is not about having occult experiences. Unfortunately, as we saw earlier and also in the chapters on enlightenment, meditation, and shamanism, many people today not only discount the dangers, they also redefine yoga-induced psychopathology as genuine experience with Jesus Christ and God. Mediumistic healer and chakra/kundalini "energizer" Rosalyn Bruyere comments:

All the myths about the rising of the kundalini and the accompanying loss of sanity are associated with the inability of an individual to hold awareness on several levels of reality simultaneously. Many of the states which we consider psychotic may in fact be "ecstatic" . . . (497:163).

## ENERGY PHENOMENA AND SPIRIT POSSESSION

Perhaps the dominant characteristic in kundalini arousal and other yoga practice is an experience of energy infusion, or possession (249:610). Gopi Krishna describes the following experiences of most yogic, meditative, and mystical practices. "During the ecstasy or trance, consciousness is transformed and the yogi, sufi, or mystic finds himself in direct rapport with an overwhelming Presence. This warm, living, conscious Presence spreads everywhere and occupies the whole mind and thought of the devotee . . ." (592:14). Furthermore, this energy "is *invariably* experienced by all mediators and yogis as some kind of *supernatural* or divine energy" (2450:62, emphasis added).

Not surprisingly, we have yet to read a kundalini or yoga theorist who defines this energy infusion, or possession, as actual demon possession; however, there is often recognition of a possessing god or entity, and sometimes references to the demonic. The Taoist Master Chao Pi Ch'en observed that "as time passes, demonic states will occur to the practiser [sic] . . ." (592:18). Significantly, yogic energy manifestations and possession are sometimes initially sensed by the experiencer as the work of an evil spirit. But this primary impression is "corrected" in accordance with Hindu theory, classifying the phenomena as a "divine process" (416 cf. 249).

But when we examine specific characteristics of kundalini arousal and its energy manifestations, we discover it is far more easily interpreted as a result of demonism than of anything divine. A perusal of the standard literature reveals the following characteristics: Kundalini energy is admittedly an occult energy; it is personal and supernatural; it can function independently of the person; it permeates and infuses the individual; it can *force* spontaneous yogic and other actions, including worship; it produces a form of consciousness and personality alteration hostile to Christian faith; it is related to evil pagan gods and deities; it is described as "being possessed" by those who experience it; it is dangerous and destructive not only to human life but to conventional societal values and morality.

In sum, kundalini arousal displays 1) an independent supernatural nature, 2) personal

volition, 3) destructive potential, 4) an amoral or evil nature, and 5) a desire for "lordship," that is, the exerting of personal control over the practitioner, forcing compliance (889).

These facts do not suggest that we are dealing with an *impersonal* energy. The facts suggest that we are dealing with personal demonic spirit entities whose goal is spiritual deception and personal ownership. Sooner or later, the person who experiences kundalini arousal, experiences spirit possession. A leading guru, Swami Muktananda, reveals that he was violently shaken by a spirit as part of the divine "work" of kundalini within him. "A great deity in the form of my guru has spread all through me as *chiti* [energy] and was shaking me," and "when I sat for meditation, my whole body shook violently, just as if I were possessed by a god or a bad spirit" (415:84,122).

Yogi Amrit Desai warns that unless the experience is interpreted "properly" for the student, "he will become frightened, thinking it to be mental illness"—or "evil spirits" (611:70-71). But it gets worse. There is also the phenomenon of mass possession which can occur among disciples gathered to hear the guru.\* This may end with the disciple finding himself in an involuntarily assumed position of worship of the guru, and, characteristically, worshipping the spirit entity possessing the guru:

... As Amrit led us deeper into meditation, I began to realize that something unusual was happening to me. . . .

Suddenly surges of energy-like electrical charges streaked up my spine. . . . Suddenly a scream from someone in the back of the room, then another. In a few moments the place was a mad house. People were crying hysterically, laughing uncontrollably, gasping for breath, even rolling on the floor. Apparently every one was experiencing some manifestation of the same energy I was feeling.

Suddenly the whole thing stopped. . . . Amrit began to explain what had happened. We had just undergone what is called a *shaktipat* [power transfer] initiation. . . . [A]ll forms of yoga and consciousness development are aimed at even-

tually awakening the kundalini force. . . . [T]he psychic energy is transferred directly from guru to disciple.

Simply by being in Yogi Desai's presence we had all experienced to some degree the awakening of the *Shakti* [power]. How this comes about is somewhat mysterious. Yogi Desai explains that the astral body of the guru merges with that of the disciple. . . . My body filled with a brilliant white light and I allowed myself to be absorbed in it. . . .

When I opened my eyes again I noticed that my body had bent forward; my forehead was touching the floor. I do not remember assuming that position. I was actually bowing down to Yogi Desai! I had never bowed to anyone in my life but some inner unknown force had prompted me. . . . [H]e was surrounded by persons who only two hours before had never seen him but now sat on the floor around him, holding his feet, even kissing his feet. . . . (612:185-87). (In our chapter on *meditation* we have quoted similar experiences by the followers of Da Free John).

Consider the following descriptions while under the influence of kundalini and other forms of yoga:

- I really felt frightened, as the Power seemed something which could consume me (599:21).
- Your mind gets influenced spiritually as if some spirit has taken possession of your body and under that influence different postures of yoga are involuntarily performed without the pain or fatigue (608:95).
- It seemed that I was being controlled by some power which made me do all these things. I no longer had a will of my own (467:76).

In conclusion, kundalini arousal, like shamanism,\* typically involves some form of spirit possession or temporary or permanent insanity.

Because all yoga has the ability to arouse "kundalini," all yoga should be avoided. To offer it to the public as a form of *health* practice is highly irresponsible, if not perverse. To offer it to our children in our public schools is a betrayal of their trust.