

Light Brings Salt

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Dedicated to the Systematic Exposition of the Word of God



Can one Christianize Eastern religious practices?

By Brian Flynn

"You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way."

Over the past few years, I have received hundreds of emails regarding my opposition to Yoga and other mystical practices being used within the body of Christ. The excuses for continuing the practices range from, *it makes me feel closer to God, it is just a form of exercise, or my intention is to worship our Lord only.* Unfortunately, none of those explanations holds much water when weighed against the Word of God.

On the plains of Moab, Moses shared God's decrees and laws that the Israelites were to follow before they could enter the Promised Land:

"These are the statutes and the judgments which you shall carefully observe in the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess as long as you live on the earth. You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess serve their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. You shall tear down their altars and smash their *sacred* pillars and burn their Asherim with fire, and you shall cut down the engraved images of their gods and obliterate their name from that place. You shall not act like this toward the Lord your God..."
Deuteronomy 12:1-4

By setting these rules, God was guiding His people as to how they should worship Him only and according to *His* ways. God was also testing His people that they might prove their allegiance to Him. The warning was to avoid being ensnared in the practices of the pagans who lived there. This warning is as relevant today as it was at the time of Moses. Unfortunately, like the Israelites of old, the warning has gone unheeded.

Throughout our nation, many churches are adopting mystical practices and inviting congregations to participate in "Christian" Yoga classes. To add to this dilemma, Thomas Nelson Publishing recently published a book titled *Yoga for Christians, A Christ-Centered Approach to Physical and Spiritual Health through Yoga* by Susan Bordenkircher.

I firmly believe that those who engage in practices, whose origins are from eastern religions, will eventually be ensnared by their beliefs. During an interview with Susan Bordenkircher on ABC Evening News covering the topic of Christian Yoga, Susan makes my point. She is heard telling her students, "The only way to hear God is if we are quiet enough to listen." Susan echoes the Hindu belief that silencing one's mind is a way to get closer to God. Susan reveals either a failure of faith or her complete ignorance that a pagan practice could bring anyone closer to the God of the Bible.

Recently, I read the testimonial of a Christian who was lured into contemplative

spirituality but later discovered its deception:

"I have been a born again believer for six to seven years now and a youth leader for two. I have passionately pursued Jesus through all of them. However, not always according to truth as you will hear.

Thomas Keating's book *Open Mind, Open Heart* introduced me to the form of contemplative prayer called centering prayer nine months ago. I was captured by his deep insights, beautiful sounding wisdom, and impressive use of language. With hesitation, I began to practice centering prayer once or twice a day for about three months. I used the method Thomas Keating teaches by using a sacred word. This word was a symbol of my consent to (what I believed was) the Spirit of God and the Lordship of Jesus. My word was Abba. I repeated this word in silence to help me stop the normal flow of thoughts so my soul could rest in utter stillness, wide open to the presence (I perceived was God). This presence's comforting touch was beyond adequate expression at times. I was beginning to think Christians could not have this kind of deep intimacy with God apart from contemplative prayer.

My experiences with centering prayer were powerful to me, so it seemed only logical to believe this was God's blessing upon it. I mean how could it be wrong if my intent was to be with Jesus and the Father in intimacy and be formed into Christ's image. What was my fruit? Increased gentleness began to enter my life as well as more patience, yet so did more openness to what I could learn from Catholic Mystics, Hindus, and Buddhists. I definitely did not deny Jesus was the only way to the Father, but I could have easily headed down that path. I also read from Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, St. Teresa of Avila, Thomas Merton, Brennan Manning, Sue Monk Kidd and others. I was clearly being swept up into their program for spiritual formation (into Christ likeness, as I perceived it).

During this time, I had been visiting Lighthouse Trails website [my publisher] regularly. I now see that through its messages of warning about contemplative prayer, seeds of truth were being planted in me. At the time however, I believed your apologists were missing the mark, yet I responded by seeking God for the truth, asking to be corrected and granted repentance if I was in the wrong. Then during my second time through *Open Mind, Open Heart* on page 127 I read, speaking of human nature: "This basic core of goodness is capable of unlimited development; indeed, of becoming transformed into Christ and deified."

I could no longer practice this prayer with a good conscience after reading that statement by Keating."

This powerful testimony illustrates how one can be drawn into beliefs contrary to Scripture by practices forbidden by God. Deuteronomy 12:29-31 states:

"When the Lord your God cuts off before you the nations which you are going in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, beware that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, "How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?" You shall not behave thus toward the Lord your God, for every abominable act which the Lord hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods."

How do these nations serve their Gods? Do Hindus use Yoga as a way of worshipping their gods? Swami Param of the Classical Yoga Hindu Academy and Dharma Yoga Ashram in Manahawkin, N.J. describes Yoga this way, "The word Yoga is most often defined as a yoking, or union. Its practice strives to unite the individual soul with the 'greater soul' of the universe."

The answer is clearly yes. What is the Bible's response? You shall not behave thus toward the Lord your God. *But I only use it for exercise.* The Lord hates it!

Tilden Edwards, the founder of the Shalem Institute states, "What makes a particular practice Christian is not its source, but its intent." But to Mr. Edwards I must say, intention is irrelevant. You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way. The Lord hates it!

In his book, *Jesus and Buddha: Good Friends*, Edwards states:

"For many years, I have kept in my office an ink drawing of two smiling figures with their arms around each other: Jesus Christ and Gautama Buddha, with the caption: "Jesus and Buddha must be very good friends." They are not the same, but they are friends, not enemies, and they are not indifferent to one another. From the very beginning of Shalem [Institute], I have been moved to affirm that statement."

The Bible's response, "...beware that you are not ensnared to follow them." Tilden Edwards is clearly ensnared and sadly, so are his followers.

The words of the Bible are clear. You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way. The only decision left is whether you will choose to follow His Word or be pulled into mystical deception and away from the very Lord you claim to worship.

A Report for Peace? Not Hardly!

(News excerpt from Word of Life Ministries)

The Iraq Study Group recommendations if followed could very well determine America's position in the ancient prophecies about all nations turning against Israel. One of the central themes of the report was that Israel needed to make concessions with its Islamic neighbors in order to achieve peace, yet the rest of the report may undermine the United State's ability to assist Israel in reaching a balanced and fair consensus. The report gave the strong impression that the United States was failing in Iraq, or in less

politically correct terms, was losing. So much so, that the recommendations suggested negotiating with Iran and Syria to help with brokering peace and stability in Iraq.

Meantime, the recommendations had a "cut and run" theme throughout, demanding troop withdrawals. To the Islamic world, negotiations with Syria and Iran, the two nations considered by Islam as the heart of the jihad against Israel and the infidels, means surrender or at the very least, submission. Combined with troop withdrawals, Islam can claim a victory over what has been to date considered the most powerful military in the world. Meantime, the Israeli-American position in the Middle East is weakened further because any negotiations with Iran and Syria will mean concessions in the larger picture of Syria, Lebanon, and Hezbollah and Hamas in Lebanon and Gaza.

Already, Syria is putting on the table its price for helping in Iraq—control of the strategic Golan Heights that overlook Israel and provided high ground sniper fire on Israeli citizens and farmers every day until Israel seized control of the land in 1967. Buthaina Shaaban, Syria's Expatriate Affairs Minister, told Al Jazeera the Iraq Study Group report is good news. She said, "It means, God willing, the end of this era of American intervention in the region and the American occupation of Iraq which brought catastrophic ramifications on the whole region." Egyptian Islamic columnist Fahmi Howeidy wrote, "The age of U.S. monopoly of the tools of the game in the region is over."

The Iraq Study Group successfully portrayed the image that America, or at least her will, is significantly weakened by the Islamic terrorist resistance, and in negotiating terms, that means far less strength in protecting Israel, and even America itself. The 2,500 year old prophecy of Zechariah 12:3 says, "And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it." The first part of this prophecy appears to be coming into fulfillment because United States politicians seem to no longer have the political will to stand firm against Islam.