**Objections to yoga**

**by Gerard Feller**

Many doctors these days are quick to recommend yoga to their patients, especially if the symptoms, such as stress, tension or anxiety, are mental health-related. Since there is often no discernible physical basis for these problems, a doctor can't do much beyond perscribing tranquilizers or suggesting a visit to a yoga-evening. Since this is such a common scenario, we ought to find out whether yoga does, in fact, offer a solution for the symptoms mentioned above and whether it is a sound solution rather than a temporary and/or harmful one.

There are, of course, many different types of yoga exercises. A lot depends on the yoga teacher. Many yoga teachers are not even aware of the origin of yoga, true yoga positions, or the purpose of practicing them. These yoga teachers present as "yoga" a couple of harmless physical exercises, i.e. common western, physical exercises which are physiologically sound and do indeed lead to improved physical condition.

The question remains, however, whether these exercises are effective in treating psychological tensions and problems. The kind of yoga we are talking about here is offered by a yoga teacher who is very much aware of the philosophy behind the yoga techniques, a teacher who practices genuine yoga.--not just a few harmless exercises, but a technique combined with a philosophy concerning the purpose of life and the way you live. We are talking about Hinduism, the religion yoga is rooted in.

It's all about the good works (karma) a person has to do to connect the self (atman) with the cosmos (brahman), and to become one with the infinite cosmos which is both Nothing and All (nirvana). Hinduism does not believe in the physical world as a creation the way the Bible explains it. Hinduism does not believe in a personal God, in redemption by grace through Jesus Christ, or in life after death in heaven, God's dwelling place. This is why yoga is based on very different principles. Yoga positions are not harmless exercises; their purpose for Hindus is to facilitate meditation. The goal of meditation is attaining self-knowledge and discovering the divine self. This is the purpose of yoga positions. Many of them are positions by means of which practitioners identify with their gods. In addition, yoga exercises are unadvisable from a physio-therapeutic point of view. The exercises are too static and they often overload the posture-and movement mechanisms. The breathing exercise, likewise, do not teach a natural physiological breathing process. When doctors refer people with mental health problems to yoga teachers, and these people end up with a "genuine" yoga teacher, it remains to be seen whether they will truly be helped since the goals of the yoga teacher are completely different. It's more likely that such a person will be introduced to the basics of Hinduism. This is why it is so important to learn about the background of yoga from a biblical perpective.

**Physiotherapeutical objections to yoga exercises**

The main objection is that the breathing exercises are physiologically incorrect.

1. Yoga practitioners claim that breathing is not limited to the lungs, that the breath (energy) flows through different organs and body parts (suggestion).

2. Breathing exercises focus primarily on abdominal respiration (center of the diaphragm), and there is no physiological flow into abdominal side or chest breathing.

3. The breath is held for unnaturally long periods, disregarding the need for air. (This varies from person to person and depends on the load.)

4. This (incorrect) breathing pattern is taught statically in practice (not functionally).

5. The goal is not to increase lung capacity, but to suppress the autonomic nervous system, which may disrupt the patient's equilibrium (parasympathetic-sympathetic) and lead to unforeseen consequences.

6. The patient does not have a sufficient sense of awareness concerning breathing volume and direction, which means there is no practical, day-to-day benefit. It is an artificial exercise, not a daily practice applied to work and other activities.

7. In the same way, the purpose of the starting positions is neither to hinder nor facilitate the breathing function; their function is based on astrological considerations. The goal is to affect the autonomic nervous system.

8. These breathing techniques can even be dangerous in conjunction with many kinds of lung disease and organic disorders, partly because of the straining which often happens during the exercises.

**ASANA'S physical exercises**

Again, the main objection here is that the exercises are not physiologically

constructed. Astrological considerations play a major role here, as well. The asana's,

the positions, are static (isometric tension), which, exacerbated by extended holding,

overloads the posture- and movement mechanisms.

Cuff- and ligament lesions are common complications. Eventually, imbalanced

overloading may even lead to accelerated degeneration of the joints and cartillage

problems. There is no coordinated approach to exercising the various elements of

physiological movement and posture, such as mobility and muscle strength. Individual muscular balance or posture and movement issues are not taken into account. The

aim of the exercises is to get the body into a “meditative posture.” The lengthy static isometric exercises also tend to overload the circulatory system. Straining may lead to higher blood pressure, or even to a collapse caused by a shift of the tenth cranial nerve during breathing exercises. The “headstand”, often practised by untrained individuals, is infamous, too. People with (dormant) posture/movement mechanism issues risk injury by participating in imbalanced exercises (often without correction). The dangers described here apply to “genuine” yoga exercises. Yoga literally means “connecting yoke” The goal of the yoga teacher is to connect with the “gods” in the cosmos through exercises and meditation. If you would like to read an extensive analysis about meditation and relaxation exercises in yoga, see our article about mindfulness:

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