

Question and Answer: At the foot of the Cross

Meditation and Yoga

Richard Gurgel

I'm a social worker. In mailings for continuing education, ads for exercise classes in the newspaper, and brochures from our local hospital, more encouragements for meditation/yoga/Eastern religion are creeping in. What are Christians to do?

In order to provide context for FIC readers, I'll quote material you included with your question.

Here's a segment of a newspaper article about a class at a medical clinic:

Jin Shin Jyutsu physio-philosophy is an ancient art harmonizing the life energy in the body. Our bodies contain several energy pathways that feed life into all our cells. When one or more of these paths become blocked, this barrier effect may lead to discomfort or even pain. Through Jin Shin Jyutsu, our awareness is awakened to the simple ability to harmonize or balance ourselves physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Here's a course offered by a hospital:

Divine Heart Meditation—Learn meditation that can be practiced at any time, but is particularly beneficial in the morning. If done regularly, this practice leads to opening of the heart center, filling you with positive energy, more connection, tolerance, and joy. This meditation helps arrest negative thoughts, emotions, and perceptions and helps to ground you in heart energy so feelings of abundance and love are rediscovered.

Another brochure announced a "Mindfulness" seminar. This seminar was approved in several states for continuing education credit for counselors, social workers, and nurses. The seminar leader listed in her credentials that she and one of her mentors were students of Buddhism.

As America moves into a post-Christian era, it shouldn't surprise us to see more of such things. It's amazing what people will believe as long as it's not in the Bible. While organized religion is a dirty word in America, do-it-yourself spirituality is hot.

This is nothing new. "Christian" mysticism—the attempt to contact God directly, apart from his means of grace—has existed for centuries. Many mystical practices are strikingly similar to what is becoming popular in our country.

Those who advocate these techniques often scoff at the closed-minded Christians who hesitate to become involved. Or they try to soothe consciences by claiming that Christians have practiced similar forms of meditation for centuries. Others insist they have cleansed their practices of all religious connotations so they are nothing but tools to help people relax and improve overall health.

It's possible, theoretically, to imagine an exercise technique originating in Eastern religion so divorced from its philosophical origins that it becomes a spiritually neutral way to promote physical health. Yet remnants of religious philosophy often remain.

Most helpful of all is to understand the completely opposite worldview of Eastern religions and Christianity. Eastern religions teach that the human problem is ignorance. They teach that "God" isn't found outside of us so much as within us. The goal is to unleash our divine potential locked up within. One path to reach that divine inside is to "turn off" our conscious minds polluted by the world so that we can reconnect to the purer subconscious. Enlightenment comes from within.

Christians recognize that nothing good lives in us by nature. Our human heart is the problem, not the answer. While we certainly seek to get our minds off the sinful world's deceptions, Christian meditation doesn't seek to empty our mind of conscious thought but to fill our hearts with God's promises. Our path to "enlightenment" comes not from within but from God's redeeming power in Word and sacraments.

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